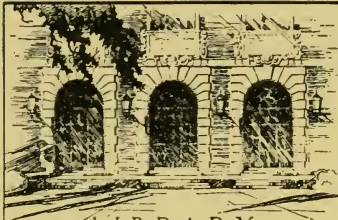


THE NETHER WORLD



GEORGE GISSING



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THE NETHER WORLD

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THE
NETHER WORLD

A NOVEL

BY
GEORGE GISSING

AUTHOR OF "DEMOS," ETC.

"La peinture d'un fumier peut être justifiée pourvu qu'il y pousse une belle fleur : sans cela, le fumier n'est que repoussant."


M. RENAN, *at the Académie Française, Feb. 21, 1889.*

IN THREE VOLS.

VOL. III.

LONDON
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THE NETHER WORLD.



CHAPTER I.

THE SOUP-KITCHEN.

WITH the first breath of winter there passes a voice half-menacing, half-mournful, through all the barren ways and phantom-haunted refuges of the nether world. Too quickly has vanished the brief season when the sky is clement, when a little food suffices, and the chances of earning that little are more numerous than at other times ; this wind that gives utterance to its familiar warning is the vaunt-courier of cold and hunger and solicitude that knows not sleep. Will the winter be a hard one ? It is the question that concerns this world before all others, that occupies alike the patient workfolk who have yet their home unbroken, the strugglers foredoomed to loss of such scant needments as the summer gifted

them withal, the hopeless and the self-abandoned and the lurking creatures of prey. To all of them the first chill breath from a lowering sky has its voice of admonition ; they set their faces ; they sigh, or whisper a prayer, or fling out a curse, each according to his nature.

And as though the strife here were not already hard enough, behold from many corners of the land come needy emigrants, prospectless among their own people, fearing the dark season which has so often meant for them the end of wages and of food, tempted hither by thought that in the shadow of palaces work and charity are both more plentiful. Vagabonds, too, no longer able to lie about the country roads, creep back to their remembered lairs and join the combat for crusts flung forth by casual hands. Day after day the stress becomes more grim. One would think that hosts of the weaker combatants might surely find it seasonable to let themselves be trodden out of existence, and so make room for those of more useful sinew ; somehow they cling to life ; so few in comparison yield utterly. The thoughtful in the world above look about them with contentment when carriage-ways are deep

with new-fallen snow. "Good; here is work for the unemployed." Ah, if the winter did but last a few months longer, if the wonted bounds of endurance were but, by some freak of nature, sensibly overpassed, the carriage-ways would find another kind of sweeping! . . .

This winter was the last that Shooter's Gardens were destined to know. The leases had all but run out; the middlemen were garnering their latest profits; in the spring there would come a wholesale demolition, and model-lodgings would thereafter occupy the site. Meanwhile the Gardens looked their surliest; the walls stood in a perpetual black sweat; a mouldy reek came from the open doorways; the beings that passed in and out seemed soaked with grimy moisture, puffed into distortions, hung about with rotting garments. One such was Mrs. Candy, Pennyloaf's mother. Her clothing consisted of a single gown and a shawl made out of the fragments of an old counterpane; her clothing,—with exception of the shoes on her feet, those two articles were literally all that covered her bare body. Rage for drink was with her reaching the final mania. Useless to bestow anything

upon her ; straightway it or its value passed over the counter of the beershop in Rosoman Street. She cared only for beer, the brave, thick, medicated draught, that was so cheap and frenzied her so speedily.

Her husband was gone for good. One choking night of November he beat her to such purpose that she was carried off to the police-station as dead ; the man effected his escape, and was not likely to show himself in the Gardens again. With her still lived her son Stephen, the potman. His payment was ten shillings a week (with a daily allowance of three pints), and he saw to it that there was always a loaf of bread in the room they occupied together. Stephen took things with much philosophy ; his mother would, of course, drink herself to death,—what was there astonishing in that ? He himself had heart disease, and surely enough would drop down dead one of these days ; the one doom was no more to be quarrelled with than the other. Pennyloaf came to see them at very long intervals ; what was the use of making her visits more frequent ? She, too, viewed with a certain equanimity the progress of her mother's fate.

Vain every kind of interposition ; worse than imprudence to give the poor creature money or money's worth. It could only be hoped that the end would come before very long.

An interesting house, this in which Mrs. Candy resided. It contained in all seven rooms, and each room was the home of a family ; under the roof slept twenty-five persons, men, women, and children ; the lowest rent paid by one of these domestic groups was four-and-sixpence. You would have enjoyed a peep into the rear chamber on the ground floor. There dwelt a family named Hope,—Mr. and Mrs. Hope, Sarah Hope, aged fifteen, Dick Hope, aged twelve, Betsy Hope, aged three. The father was a cripple ; he and his wife occupied themselves in the picking of rags,—of course at home,—and I can assure you that the atmosphere of their abode was worthy of its aspect. Mr. Hope drank, but not desperately. His forte was the use of language so peculiarly violent that even in Shooter's Gardens it gained him a proud reputation. On the slightest excuse he would threaten to brain one of his children, to disembowel another, to gouge out the eyes of the

third. He showed much ingenuity in varying the forms of menaced punishment. Not a child in the Gardens but was constantly threatened by its parents with a violent death ; this was so familiar that it had lost its effect ; where the nurse or mother in the upper world cries, "I shall scold you !" in the nether the phrase is, "I'll knock yer 'ed orff !" To "I shall be very angry with you" in the one sphere, corresponds in the other, "I'll murder you !" These are conventions,—matters of no importance. But Mr. Hope was a man of individuality ; he could make his family tremble ; he could bring lodgers about the door to listen and admire his resources.

In another room abode a mother with four children. This woman drank moderately, but was very conscientious in despatching her three younger children to school. True, there was just a little inconvenience in this punctuality of hers, at all events from the youngsters' point of view, for only on the first three days of the week had they the slightest chance of a mouthful of breakfast before they departed. "Never mind, I'll have some dinner for you," their parent was wont to say. Common enough

in the board-schools, this pursuit of knowledge on an empty stomach. But then the end is so inestimable !

Yet another home. It was tenanted by two persons only ; they appeared to be man and wife, but in the legal sense were not so, nor did they for a moment seek to deceive their neighbours. With the female you are slightly acquainted ; christened Sukey Jollop, she first became Mrs. Jack Bartley, and now, for courtesy's sake, was styled Mrs. Higgs. Sukey had strayed on to a downward path ; conscious of it, she abandoned herself to her taste for strong drink, and braved out her degradation. Jealousy of Clem Peckover was the first cause of discord between her and Jack Bartley ; a robust young woman, she finally sent Jack about his business by literal force of arms, and entered into an alliance with Ned Higgs, a notorious swashbuckler, the captain of a gang of young ruffians who at this date were giving much trouble to the Clerkenwell police. Their specialty was the skilful use, as an offensive weapon, of a stout leathern belt heavily buckled ; Mr. Higgs boasted that with one stroke of his belt he could, if it seemed good

to him, kill his man, but the fitting opportunity for this display of prowess had not yet offered. . . .

Now it happened that, at the time of her making Jane Snowdon's acquaintance, Miss Lant was particularly interested in Shooter's Gardens and the immediate vicinity. She had associated herself with certain ladies who undertook the control of a soup-kitchen in the neighbourhood, and as the winter advanced she engaged Jane in this work of charity. It was a good means, as Michael Snowdon agreed, of enabling the girl to form acquaintances among the very poorest, those whom she hoped to serve effectively,—not with aid of money alone, but by her personal influence. And I think it will be worth while to dwell a little on the story of this same soup-kitchen; it is significant, and shall take the place of abstract comment on Miss Lant's philanthropic enterprises.

The kitchen had been doing successful work for some years; the society which established it entrusted its practical conduct to very practical people, a man and wife who were themselves of the nether world, and knew the ways

thereof. The "stock" which formed the basis of the soup was wholesome and nutritious; the peas were of excellent quality; twopence a quart was the price at which this fluid could be purchased (one penny if a ticket from a member of the committee were presented), and sometimes as much as five hundred quarts would be sold in a day. Satisfactory enough this. When the people came with complaints, saying that they were tired of this particular soup, and would like another kind for a change, Mr. and Mrs. Batterby, with perfect understanding of the situation, bade their customers "take it or leave it,—an' none o' your cheek here, or you won't get nothing at all!" The result was much good-humour all round.

But the present year saw a change in the constitution of the committee: two or three philanthropic ladies of great conscientiousness began to inquire busily into the working of the soup-kitchen, and they soon found reason to be altogether dissatisfied with Mr. and Mrs. Batterby. No, no; these managers were of too coarse a type; they spoke grossly; what possibility of their exerting a humanising in-

fluence on the people to whom they dispensed soup? Soup and refinement must be disseminated at one and the same time, over the same counter. Mr. and Mrs. Batterby were dismissed, and quite a new order of things began. Not only were the ladies zealous for a high ideal in the matter of soup-distributing; they also aimed at practical economy in the use of funds. Having engaged a cook after their own hearts, and acting upon the advice of competent physiologists, they proceeded to make a "stock" out of sheep's and bullocks' heads; moreover, they ordered their peas from the City, thus getting them at two shillings a sack less than the price formerly paid by the Batterbys to a dealer in Clerkenwell. But, alas! these things could not be done secretly; the story leaked out; Shooter's Gardens and vicinity broke into the most excited feeling. I need not tell you that the nether world will consume—when others supply it—nothing but the very finest quality of food,—that the heads of sheep and bullocks are peculiarly offensive to its stomach,—that a saving effected on sacks of peas outrages its dearest sensibilities. What was the result? Shooter's Gardens, convinced

of the fraud practised upon them, nobly brought back their quarts of soup to the Kitchen and with proud independence of language demanded to have their money returned. On being met with a refusal, they — what think you? — emptied the soup on to the floor, and went away with heads exalted.

Vast was the indignation of Miss Lant and the other ladies. “This is their gratitude!” Now if you or I had been there, what an opportunity for easing our minds! “Gratitude, mesdames? You have entered upon this work with expectation of gratitude?—And can you not perceive that these people of Shooter’s Gardens are poor, besotted, disease-struck creatures, of whom—in the mass—scarcely a human quality is to be expected? Have you still to learn what this nether world has been made by those who belong to the sphere above it?—Gratitude, quotha?—Nay, do *you* be grateful that these hapless, half-starved women do not turn and rend you. At present they satisfy themselves with insolence. Take it silently, you who at all events hold some count of their dire state; and endeavour to feed them without arousing their animosity!”

Well, the Kitchen threatened to be a failure. It turned out that the cheaper peas were, in fact, of inferior quality, and the ladies hastened to go back to the dealer in Clerkenwell. This was something, but now came a new trouble; the complaint with which Mr. and Mrs. Batterby had known so well how to deal revived in view of the concessions made by the new managers. Shooter's Gardens would have no more peas; let some other vegetable be used. Again the point was conceded; a trial was made of barley-soup. Shooter's Gardens came, looked, smelt, and shook their heads. "It don't look nice," was their comment; they would none of it.

For two or three weeks, just at this crisis in the Kitchen's fate, Jane Snowdon attended with Miss Lant to help in the dispensing of the decoction. Jane was made very nervous by the disturbances that went on, but she was able to review the matter at issue in a far more fruitful way than Miss Lant and the other ladies. Her opinion was not asked, however. In the homely grey dress, with her modest, retiring manner, her gentle, diffident countenance, she was taken by the customers for a

paid servant, and if ever it happened that she could not supply a can of soup quickly enough sharp words reached her ear. "Now then, you gyurl there! Are you goin' to keep me all d'y? I've got somethink else to do but stand 'ere." And Jane, by her timid hastening, confirmed the original impression, with the result that she was treated yet more unceremoniously next time. Of all forms of insolence there is none more flagrant than that of the degraded poor receiving charity which they have come to regard as a right.

Jane did speak at length. Miss Lant had called to see her in Hanover Street; seated quietly in her own parlour, with Michael Snowdon to approve,—with him she had already discussed the matter,—Jane ventured softly to compare the present state of things and that of former winters, as described to her by various people.

"Wasn't it rather a pity," she suggested, "that the old people were sent away?"

"You think so?" returned Miss Lant, with the air of one to whom a novel thought is presented. "You really think so, Miss Snowdon?"

"They got on so well with everybody,"

Jane continued. "And don't you think it's better, Miss Lant, for everybody to feel satisfied?"

"But really, Mr. Batterby used to speak so very harshly. He destroyed their self-respect."

"I don't think they minded it," said Jane, with simple good faith. "And I'm always hearing them wish he was back, instead of the new managers."

"I think we shall have to consider this," remarked the lady, thoughtfully.

Considered it was, and with the result that the Batterbys before long found themselves in their old position, uproariously welcomed by Shooter's Gardens. In a few weeks the soup was once more concocted of familiar ingredients, and customers, as often as they grumbled, had the pleasure of being rebuked in their native tongue.

It was with anything but a cheerful heart that Jane went through this initiation into the philanthropic life. Her brief period of joy and confidence was followed by a return of anxiety, which no resolve could suppress. It was not only that the ideals to which she strove to form herself made no genuine appeal

to her nature ; the imperative hunger of her heart remained unsatisfied. At first, when the assurance received from Michael began to lose a little of its sustaining force, she could say to herself, "Patience, patience ; be faithful, be trustful, and your reward will soon come." Nor would patience have failed her had but the current of life flowed on in the old way. It was the introduction of new and disturbing things that proved so great a test of fortitude. Those two successive absences of Sidney on the appointed evening were strangely unlike him, but perhaps could be explained by the unsettlement of his removal ; his manner when at length he did come proved that the change in himself was still proceeding. Moreover, the change affected Michael, who manifested increase of mental trouble at the same time that he yielded more and more to physical infirmity.

The letter which Sidney wrote after receiving Joseph Snowdon's confidential communications was despatched two days later. He expressed himself in carefully chosen words, but the purport of the letter was to make known that he no longer thought of Jane save

as a friend; that the change in her position had compelled him to take another view of his relations to her than that he had confided to Michael at Danbury. Most fortunately—he added—no utterance of his feelings had ever escaped him to Jane herself, and henceforth he should be still more careful to avoid any suggestion of more than brotherly interest. In very deed nothing was altered; he was still her steadfast friend, and would always aid her to his utmost in the work of her life.

That Sidney could send this letter, after keeping it in reserve for a couple of days, proved how profoundly his instincts were revolted by the difficulties and the ambiguity of his position. It had been bad enough when only his own conscience was in play; the dialogue with Joseph, following upon Bessie Byass's indiscretion, threw him wholly off his balance, and he could give no weight to any consideration but the necessity of recovering self-respect. Even the sophistry of that repeated statement that he had never approached Jane as a lover did not trouble him in face of the injury to his pride. Every

word of Joseph Snowdon's transparently artful hints was a sting to his sensitiveness; the sum excited him to loathing. It was as though the corner of a curtain had been raised, giving him a glimpse of all the vile greed, the base machination, hovering about this fortune that Jane was to inherit. Of Scawthorne he knew nothing, but his recollection of the Peckovers was vivid enough to suggest what part Mrs. Joseph Snowdon was playing in the present intrigues, and he felt convinced that in the background were other beasts of prey, watching with keen, envious eyes. The sudden revelation was a shock from which he would not soon recover; he seemed to himself to be in a degree contaminated; he questioned his most secret thoughts again and again, recognising with torment the fears which had already bidden him draw back; he desired to purify himself by some unmistakable action.

That which happened he had anticipated. On receipt of the letter Michael came to see him; he found the old man waiting in front of the house when he returned to Red Lion Street after his work. The conversation that followed

was a severe test of Sidney's resolve. Had Michael disclosed the fact of his private understanding with Jane, Sidney would probably have yielded ; but the old man gave no hint of what he had done,—partly because he found it difficult to make the admission, partly in consequence of an indecision in his own mind with regard to the very point at issue. Though agitated by the consciousness of suffering in store for Jane, his thoughts disturbed by the derangement of a part of his plan, he did not feel that Sidney's change of mind gravely affected the plan itself. Age had cooled his blood ; enthusiasm had made personal interests of comparatively small account to him ; he recognised his granddaughter's feeling, but could not appreciate its intensity, its supreme significance. When Kirkwood made a show of explaining himself, saying that he shrank from that form of responsibility, that such a marriage suggested to him many and insuperable embarrassments, Michael began to reflect that perchance this was the just view. With household and family cares, could Jane devote herself to the great work after the manner of his ideal ? Had he not been tempted by

his friendship for Sidney to introduce into his scheme what was really an incompatible element? Was it not decidedly, infinitely better that Jane should be unmarried?

Michael had taken the last step in that process of dehumanisation which threatens idealists of his type. He had reached at length the pass of those frenzied votaries of a supernatural creed who exact from their disciples the sacrifice of every human piety. Returning home, he murmured to himself again and again, "She must not marry. She must overcome this desire of a happiness such as ordinary women may enjoy. For my sake, and for the sake of her suffering fellow-creatures, Jane must win this victory over herself."

He purposed speaking to her, but put it off from day to day. Sidney paid his visits as usual, and tried desperately to behave as though he had no trouble. Could he have divined why it was that Michael had ended by accepting his vague pretences with apparent calm, indignation, wrath, would have possessed him; he believed, however, that the old man out of kindness subdued what he really felt. Sidney's state was pitiable. He knew not whether

he more shrank from the thought of being infected with Joseph Snowdon's baseness or despised himself for his attitude to Jane. Despicable entirely had been his explanations to Michael, but how could he make them more sincere? To tell the whole truth, to reveal Joseph's tactics, would be equivalent to taking a part in the dirty contest; Michael would probably do him justice, but who could say how far Joseph's machinations were becoming effectual? The slightest tinct of uncertainty in the old man's thought, and he, Kirkwood, became a plotter like the others, meeting mine with countermine.

"There will be no possibility of perfect faith between men until there is no such thing as money! H'm, and when is that likely to come to pass?"

Thus he epigrammatised to himself one evening, savagely enough, as with head bent forward he plodded to Red Lion Street. Some one addressed him; he looked up and saw Jane. Seemingly it was a chance meeting, but she put a question at once almost as though she had been waiting for him. "Have you seen Pennyloaf lately, Mr. Kirkwood?"

Pennyloaf? The name suggested Bob Hewett, who again suggested John Hewett, and so Sidney fell upon thoughts of some one who two days ago had found a refuge in John's home. To Michael he had said nothing of what he knew concerning Clara, a fresh occasion of uneasy thought. Bob Hewett—so John said—had no knowledge of his sister's situation, otherwise Pennyloaf might have come to know about it, and in that case, perchance, Jane herself. Why not? Into what a wretched muddle of concealments and inconsistencies and insincerities had he fallen!

"It's far too long since I saw her," he replied, in that softened tone which he found it impossible to avoid when his eyes met Jane's.

She was on her way home from the soup-kitchen, where certain occupations had kept her much later than usual; this, however, was far out of her way, and Sidney remarked on the fact, perversely, when she had offered this explanation of her meeting him. Jane did not reply. They walked on together, towards Islington.

"Are you going to help at that place all the winter?" he inquired.

“Yes; I think so.”

If he had spoken his thought, he would have railed against the soup-kitchen and all that was connected with it. So far had he got in his revolt against circumstances; Jane’s “mission” was hateful to him; he could not bear to think of her handing soup over a counter to ragged wretches.

“You’re nothing like as cheerful as you used to be,” he said, suddenly, and all but roughly. “Why is it?”

What a question! Jane reddened as she tried to look at him with a smile; no words would come to her tongue.

“Do you go anywhere else, besides to—to that place?”

Not often. She had accompanied Miss Lant on a visit to some people in Shooter’s Gardens.

Sidney bent his brows. A nice spot, Shooter’s Gardens.

“The houses are going to be pulled down, I’m glad to say,” continued Jane. “Miss Lant thinks it’ll be a good opportunity for helping a few of the families into better lodgings. We’re going to buy furniture for them,—so many have as good as none at all, you

know. It'll be a good start for them, won't it?"

Sidney nodded. He was thinking of another family who already owed their furniture to Jane's beneficence, though they did not know it.

"Mind you don't throw away kindness on worthless people," he said presently.

"We can only do our best, and hope they'll keep comfortable for their own sakes."

"Yes, yes. Well, I'll say good-night to you here. Go home and rest; you look tired."

He no longer called her by her name. Tearing himself away, with a last look, he raged inwardly that so sweet and gentle a creature should be condemned to such a waste of her young life.

Jane had obtained what she came for. At times the longing to see him grew insupportable, and this evening she had yielded to it, going out of her way in the hope of encountering him as he came from work. He spoke very strangely. What did it all mean, and when would this winter of suspense give sign of vanishing before sunlight?

CHAPTER II.

PHANTOMS.

MR. and Mrs. Joseph Snowdon were now established in rooms in Burton Crescent, which is not far from King's Cross. Joseph had urged that Clerkenwell Close was scarcely a suitable quarter for a man of his standing, and, though with difficulty, he had achieved thus much deliverance. Of Clem he could not get rid,—just yet; but it was something to escape Mrs. Peckover's superintendence. Clem herself favoured the removal, naturally for private reasons. Thus far working in alliance with her shrewd mother, she was now forming independent projects. Mrs. Peckover's zeal was assuredly not disinterested, and why, Clem mused with herself, should the fruits of strategy be shared? Her husband's father could not, she saw every reason to believe, be much longer for this world. How his property

was to be divided she had no means of discovering ; Joseph professed to have no accurate information, but as a matter of course he was deceiving her. Should he inherit a considerable sum, it was more than probable he would think of again quitting his native land,—and without encumbrances. That movement must somehow be guarded against ; how, it was difficult as yet to determine. In the next place, Jane was sure to take a large share of the fortune. To that Clem strongly objected, both on abstract grounds and because she regarded Jane with a savage hatred,—a hatred which had its roots in the time of Jane's childhood, and which had grown in proportion as the girl reaped happiness from life. The necessity of cloaking this sentiment had not, you may be sure, tended to mitigate it. Joseph said that there was no longer any fear of a speedy marriage between Jane and Kirkwood, but that such a marriage would come off some day, —if not prevented,—Clem held to be a matter of certainty. Sidney Kirkwood was a wide-awake young man ; of course he had his satisfactory reasons for delay. Now Clem's hatred of Sidney was, from of old, only less than that

wherewith she regarded Jane. To frustrate the hopes of that couple would be a gratification worth a good deal of risk.

She heard nothing of what had befallen Clara Hewett until the latter's return home, and then not from her husband. Joseph and Scawthorne, foiled by that event in an ingenious scheme which you have doubtless understood (they little knowing how easily the severance between Jane and Kirkwood might be effected), agreed that it was well to get Clara restored to her father's household,—for, though it seemed unlikely, it was not impossible that she might in one way or another aid their schemes,—and on that account the anonymous letter was despatched which informed John Hewett of his daughter's position. Between John and Snowdon, now that they stood in the relations of master and servant, there was naturally no longer familiar intercourse, and, in begging leave of absence for his journey northwards, Hewett only said that a near relative had met with a bad accident. But it would be easy, Joseph decided, to win the man's confidence again, and thus be apprised of all that went on. With Clem he

kept silence on the subject ; not improbably she would learn sooner or later what had happened, and indeed, as things now stood, it did not matter much ; but on principle he excluded her as much as possible from his confidence. He knew she hated him, and he was not backward in returning the sentiment, though constantly affecting a cheerful friendliness in his manner to her ; after all, their union was but temporary. In Hanover Street he was also silent regarding the Hewetts, for there his *rôle* was that of a good, simple-minded fellow, incapable of intrigue, living for the domestic affections. If Kirkwood chose to speak to Michael or Jane of the matter, well, one way or another, that would advance things a stage, and there was nothing for it but to watch the progress.

Alone all through the day, and very often in the evening, Clem was not at all disposed to occupy herself in domestic activity. The lodgings were taken furnished, and a bondmaid of the house did such work as was indispensable. Dirt and disorder were matters of indifference to the pair, who represented therein the large class occupying cheap

London lodgings ; an impure atmosphere, surroundings more or less squalid, constant bickering with the landlady, coarse usage of the servant,—these things Clem understood as necessities of independent life, and it would have cost her much discomfort had she been required to live in a more civilised manner. Her ambitions were essentially gross. In the way of social advancement she appreciated nothing but an increased power of spending money, and consequently of asserting herself over others. She had no desire whatever to enter a higher class than that in which she was born ; to be of importance in her familiar circle was the most she aimed at. In visiting the theatre, she did not so much care to occupy a superior place,—indeed, such a position made her ill at ease,—as to astonish her neighbours in the pit by a lavish style of costume, by loud remarks implying a free command of cash, by purchase between the acts of something expensive to eat or drink. Needless to say that she never read anything but police news ; in the fiction of her world she found no charm, so sluggishly unimaginative was her nature. Till of late she had

either abandoned herself all day long to a brutal indolence, eating rather too much, and finding quite sufficient occupation for her slow brain in the thought of how pleasant it was not to be obliged to work, and occasionally in reviewing the chances that she might eventually have plenty of money and no Joseph Snowdon as a restraint upon her ; or else, her physical robustness demanding exercise, she walked considerable distances about the localities she knew, calling now and then upon an acquaintance.

Till of late ; but a change had come upon her life. It was now seldom that she kept the house all day ; when within-doors she was restless, quarrelsome. Joseph became aware with surprise that she no longer tried to conceal her enmity against him ; on a slight provocation she broke into a fierceness which reminded him of the day when he undeceived her as to his position, and her look at such times was murderous. It might come, he imagined, of her being released from the prudent control of her mother. However, again a few weeks and things were somewhat improved ; she eyed him like a wild beast, but

was less frequent in her outbreaks. Here, too, it might be that Mrs. Peckover's influence was at work, for Clara spent at least four evenings of the seven away from home, and always said she had been at the Close. As indifferent as it was possible to be, Joseph made no attempt to restrain her independence ; indeed he was glad to have her out of his way.

We must follow her on one of these evenings ostensibly passed at Mrs. Peckover's,—no, not follow, but discover her at nine o'clock.

In Old Street, not far from Shoreditch Station, was a shabby little place of refreshment, kept by an Italian ; pastry and sweet-stuff filled the window ; at the back of the shop, through a doorway on each side of which was looped a pink curtain, a room, furnished with three marble-topped tables, invited those who wished to eat and drink more at ease than was possible before the counter. Except on Sunday evening this room was very little used, and there, on the occasion of which I speak, Clem was sitting with Bob Hewett. They had been having supper together,—French pastry and a cup of cocoa.

She leaned forward on her elbows, and said

imperatively, "Tell Pennyloaf to make it up with her again."

"Why?"

"Because I want to know what goes on in Hanover Street. You was a fool to send her away, and you'd ought to have told me about it before now. If they was such friends, I suppose the girl told her lots o' things. But I expect they see each other just the same. You don't suppose she does all *you* tell her?"

"I'll bet you what you like she does!" cried Bob.

Clem glared at him.

"Oh, you an' your Pennyloaf! Likely she tells you the truth. You're so fond of each other, ain't you! Tells you everything, does she?—and the way you treat her!"

"Who's always at me to make me treat her worse still?" Bob retorted half angrily, half in expostulation.

"Well, and so I am, 'cause I hate the name of her! I'd like to hear as you starve her and her brats half to death. How much money did you give her last week? Now you just tell me the truth. How much was it?"

"How can I remember? Three or four bob, I s'pose."

"Three or four bob!" she repeated, snarling. "Give her one, and make her live all the week on it. Wear her down! Make her pawn all she has, and go cold!"

Her cheeks were on fire; her eyes started in the fury of jealousy; she set her teeth together.

"I'd better do for her altogether," said Bob, with an evil grin.

Clem looked at him, without speaking; kept her gaze on him; then she said in a thick voice:

"There's many a true word said in joke."

Bob moved uncomfortably. There was a brief silence, then the other, putting her face nearer his:

"Not just yet. I want to use her to get all I can about that girl and her old beast of a grandfather. Mind you do as I tell you. Pennyloaf's to have her back again, and she's to make her talk, and you're to get all you can from Pennyloaf,—understand?"

There came noises from the shop. Three work-girls had just entered and were buying

cakes, which they began to eat at the counter. They were loud in gossip and laughter, and their voices rang like brass against brass. Clem amused herself in listening to them for a few minutes; then she became absent, moving a finger round and round on her plate. A disagreeable flush still lingered under her eyes.

“Have you told her about Clara?”

“Told who?”

“Who? Pennyloaf, of course.”

“No, I haven’t. Why should I?”

“Oh, you’re such a affectionate couple! See, you’re only to give her two shillin’s next week. Let her go hungry this nice weather.”

“She won’t do that if Jane Snowdon comes back, so there you’re out of it!”

Clem bit her lip.

“What’s the odds? Make it up with a hit in the mouth now and then.”

“What do you expect to know from that girl?” inquired Bob.

“Lots o’ things. I want to know what the old bloke’s goin’ to do with his money, don’t I? And I want to know what my beast of a ’usband’s got out of him. And I want to know what that feller Kirkwood’s goin’ to

do. He'd ought to marry your sister by rights."

"Not much fear of that now."

"Trust him! He'll stick where there's money. See, Bob; if that Jane was to kick the bucket, do you think the old bloke 'ud leave it all to Jo?"

"How can I tell?"

"Well, look here. Supposin' he died an' left most to her; an' then supposin' *she* was to go off; would Jo have all her tin?"

"Course he would."

Clem mused, eating her lower lip.

"But supposin' Jo was to go off first, after the old bloke? Should I have all he left?"

"I think so, but I'm not sure."

"You think so? And then should I have all *her's*? If she had a accident, you know."

"I suppose you would. But then that's only if they didn't make wills, and leave it away from you."

Clem started. Intent as she had been for a long time on the possibilities hinted at, the thought of unfavourable disposition by will had never occurred to her. She shook it away.

“Why should they make wills? They ain’t old enough for that, neither of them.”

“And you might as well say they ain’t old enough to be likely to take their hook, either,” suggested Bob, with a certain uneasiness in his tone.

Clem looked about her, as if her fierce eyes sought something. Her brows twitched a little. She glanced at Bob, but he did not meet her look. “I don’t care so much about the money,” she said, in a lower and altered voice. “I’d be content with a bit of it, if only I could get rid of him at the same time.”

Bob looked gloomy.

“Well, it’s no use talking,” he muttered.

“It’s all your fault.”

“How do you make that out? It was you quarrelled first.”

“You’re a liar!”

“Oh, there’s no talking to you!”

He shuffled with his feet, then rose.

“Where can I see you on Wednesday morning?” asked Clem. “I want to hear about that girl.”

“It can’t be Wednesday morning. I tell you I shall be getting the sack next thing; they’ve

promised it. Two days last week I wasn't at the shop, and one day this. It can't go on."

His companion retorted angrily, and for five minutes they stood in embittered colloquy. It ended in Bob's turning away and going out into the street. Clem followed, and they walked westwards in silence. Reaching City Road, and crossing to the corner where lowers St. Luke's Hospital,—grim abode of the insane, here in the midst of London's squalor and uproar,—they halted to take leave. The last words they exchanged, after making an appointment, were of brutal violence.

This was two days after Clara Hewett's arrival in London, and the same fog still hung about the streets, allowing little to be seen save the blurred glimmer of gas. Bob sauntered through it, his hands in his pockets, observant of nothing; now and then a word escaped his lips, generally an oath. Out of Old Street he turned into Whitecross Street, whence by black and all but deserted ways,—Barbican and Long Lane,—he emerged into West Smithfield. An alley in the shadow of Bartholomew's Hospital brought him to a certain house; just as he was about to knock

at the door it opened, and Jack Bartley appeared on the threshold. They exchanged a "Hollo!" of surprise, and after a whispered word or two on the pavement, went in. They mounted the stairs to a bedroom which Jack occupied. When the door was closed:

"Bill's got copped!" whispered Bartley.

"Copped? Any of it on him?"

"Only the half-crown as he was pitchin', thank God! They let him go again after he'd been to the station. It was a conductor. I'd never try them blokes myself; they're too downy."

"Let's have a look at 'em," said Bob, after musing. "I thought myself as they wasn't quite the reg'lar."

As he spoke he softly turned the key in the door. Jack then put his arm up the chimney and brought down a small tin box, soot-blackened; he opened it, and showed about a dozen pieces of money,—in appearance half-crowns and florins. One of the commonest of offences against the law in London, this to which our young friends were not unsuccessfully directing their attention; one of the easiest to commit, moreover, for a man with

Bob's craft at his finger-ends. A mere question of a mould and a pewter-pot, if one be content with the simpler branches of the industry. "The snyde" or "the queer" is the technical name by which such products are known. Distribution is, of course, the main difficulty ; it necessitates mutual trust between various confederates. Bob Hewett still kept to his daily work, but gradually he was being drawn into alliance with an increasing number of men who scorned the yoke of a recognised occupation. His face, his clothing, his speech, all told whither he was tending, had one but the experience necessary for the noting of such points. Bob did not find his life particularly pleasant ; he was in perpetual fear ; many a time he said to himself that he would turn back. Impossible to do so ; for a thousand reasons impossible ; yet he still believed that the choice lay with him.

His colloquy with Jack only lasted a few minutes, then he walked homewards, crossing the Metropolitan Meat-market, going up St. John's Lane, beneath St. John's Arch, thence to Rosoman Street and Merlin Place, where at present he lived. All the way he pondered Clem's words. Already their import had become

familiar enough to lose that first terribleness. Of course he should never take up the proposal seriously ; no, no, that was going a bit too far ; but suppose Clem's husband were really contriving this plot on his own account ? Likely, very likely ; but he'd be a clever fellow if he managed such a thing in a way that did not immediately subject him to suspicion. How could it be done ? No harm in thinking over an affair of that kind, when you have no intention of being drawn into it yourself. There was that man at Peckham who poisoned his sister not long ago ; he was a fool to get found out in the way he did ; he might have——

The room in which he found Pennyloaf sitting was so full of fog that the lamp seemed very dim ; the fire had all but died out. One of the children lay asleep ; the other Pennyloaf was nursing, for it had a bad cough and looked much like a wax doll that has gone through a great deal of ill-usage. A few more weeks and Pennyloaf would be again a mother ; she felt very miserable as often as she thought of it, and Bob had several times spoken with harsh impatience on the subject.

At present he was in no mood for conversa-

tion ; to Pennyloaf's remarks and questions he gave not the slightest heed, but in a few minutes tumbled himself into bed.

"Get that light put out," he exclaimed, after lying still for a while.

Pennyloaf said she was uneasy about the child ; its cough seemed to be better, but it moved about restlessly and showed no sign of getting to sleep.

"Give it some of the mixture, then. Be sharp and put the light out."

Pennyloaf obeyed the second injunction, and she too lay down, keeping the child in her arms ; of the "mixture" she was afraid, for a few days since the child of a neighbour had died in consequence of an overdose of this same anodyne. For a long time there was silence in the room. Outside, voices kept sounding with that peculiar muffled distinctness which they have on a night of dense fog, when there is little or no wheel-traffic to make the wonted rumbling.

"Are y'asleep?" Bob asked suddenly.

"No."

"There's something I wanted to tell you. You can have Jane Snowdon here again, if you like."

“I can? Really?”

“You may as well make use of her. That’ll do; shut up and go to sleep.”

In the morning Pennyloaf was obliged to ask for money; she wished to take the child to the hospital again, and as the weather was very bad she would have to pay an omnibus fare. Bob growled at the demand, as was nowadays his custom. Since he had found a way of keeping his own pocket tolerably well supplied from time to time, he was becoming so penurious at home that Pennyloaf had to beg for what she needed copper by copper. Excepting breakfast, he seldom took a meal with her. The easy good-nature which in the beginning made him an indulgent husband had turned in other directions since his marriage was grown a weariness to him. He did not, in truth, spend much upon himself, but in his leisure time was always surrounded by companions whom he had a pleasure in treating with the generosity of the public-house. A word of flattery was always sure of payment if Bob had a coin in his pocket. Ever hungry for admiration, for prominence, he found new opportunities of gratifying his

taste now that he had a resource when his wages ran out. So far from becoming freer-handed again with his wife and children, he grudged every coin that he was obliged to expend on them. Pennyloaf's submissiveness encouraged him in this habit; where other wives would have "made a row," she yielded at once to his grumbling and made shift with the paltriest allowance. You should have seen the kind of diet on which she habitually lived. Like all the women of her class, utterly ignorant and helpless in the matter of preparing food, she abandoned the attempt to cook anything, and expended her few pence daily on whatever happened to tempt her in a shop, when meal-time came round. In the present state of her health she often suffered from a morbid appetite and fed on things of incredible unwholesomeness. Thus, there was a kind of cake exposed in a window in Rosoman Street, two layers of pastry with half an inch of something like very coarse mincemeat between; it cost a halfpenny a square, and not seldom she ate four, or even six, of these squares, as heavy as lead, making this her dinner. A cookshop within her range exhibited at mid-

day great dough-puddings, kept hot by jets of steam that came up through the zinc on which they lay ; this food was cheap and satisfying, and Pennyloaf often regaled both herself and the children on thick slabs of it. Pease-pudding also attracted her ; she fetched it from the pork-butcher's in a little basin, which enabled her to bring away at the same time a spoonful or two of gravy from the joints of which she was not rich enough to purchase a cut. Her drink was tea ; she had the pot on the table all day, and kept adding hot water. Treacle she purchased now and then, but only as a treat when her dinner had cost even less than usual ; she did not venture to buy more than a couple of ounces at a time, knowing by experience that she could not resist this form of temptation, and must eat and eat till all was finished.

Bob flung sixpence on to the table. He was ashamed of himself,—you will not understand him if you fail to recognise that,—but the shame only served to make him fret under his bondage. Was he going to be tied to Pennyloaf all his life, with a family constantly increasing ? Practically he had already made

a resolve to be free before very long ; the way was not quite clear to him as yet. But he went to work still brooding over Clem's words of the night before.

Pennyloaf let the fire go out, locked the elder child into the room for safety against accidents, and set forth for the hospital. It rained heavily, and the wind rendered her umbrella useless. She had to stand for a long time at a street-corner before the omnibus came ; the water soaked into her leaky shoes, but that didn't matter ; it was the child on whose account she was anxious. Having reached her destination, she sat for a long time waiting her turn among the numerous out-patients. Just as the opportunity for passing into the doctor's room arrived, a movement in the bundle she held made her look closely at the child's face ; at that instant it had ceased to live.

The medical man behaved kindly to her, but she gave way to no outburst of grief ; with tearless eyes she stared at the unmoving body in a sort of astonishment. The questions addressed to her she could not answer with any intelligence ; several times she asked

stupidly, "Is she really dead?" There was nothing to wonder at, however; the doctor glanced at the paper on which he had written prescriptions twice or thrice during the past few weeks, and found the event natural enough. . . .

Towards the close of the afternoon Pennyloaf was in Hanover Street. She wished to see Jane Snowdon, but had a fear of going up to the door and knocking. Jane might not be at home, and, if she were, Pennyloaf did not know in what words to explain her coming and say what had happened. She was in a dazed, heavy, tongue-tied state; indeed she did not clearly remember how she had come thus far, or what she had done since leaving the hospital at midday. However, her steps drew nearer to the house, and at last she had raised the knocker,—just raised it and let it fall.

Mrs. Byass opened; she did not know Pennyloaf by sight. The latter tried to say something, but only stammered a meaningless sound; thereupon Bessie concluded she was a beggar, and with a shake of the head shut the door upon her.

Pennyloaf turned away in confusion and dull

misery. She walked to the end of the street and stood there. On leaving home she had forgotten her umbrella, and now it was raining heavily again. Of a sudden her need became powerful enough to overcome all obstacles; she knew that she *must* see Jane Snowdon, that she could not go home till she had done so. Jane was the only friend she had; the only creature who would speak the kind of words to her for which she longed.

Again the knocker fell, and again Mrs. Byass appeared.

“What do you want? I’ve got nothing for you,” she cried impatiently.

“I want to see Miss Snowdon, please, mum, —Miss Snowdon, please”——

“Miss Snowdon? Then why didn’t you say so? Step inside.”

A few moments and Jane came running downstairs.

“Pennyloaf!”

Ah! that was the voice that did good. How it comforted and blessed, after the hospital, and the miserable room in which the dead child was left lying, and the rainy street!

CHAPTER III.

ON A BARREN SHORE.

ABOUT this time Mr. Scawthorne received one morning a letter which, though not unexpected, caused him some annoyance, and even anxiety. It was signed "C. V.," and made brief request for an interview on the evening of the next day at Waterloo Station.

The room in which our friend sat at breakfast was of such very modest appearance that it seemed to argue but poor remuneration for the services rendered by him in the office of Messrs. Percival & Peel. It was a parlour on the second floor of a lodging-house in Chelsea; Scawthorne's graceful person and professional bearing were out of place amid the trivial appointments. He lived here for the simple reason that in order to enjoy a few of the luxuries of civilisation he had to spend as little as possible on bare necessities. His habits

away from home were those of a man to whom a few pounds are no serious consideration ; his pleasant dinner at the restaurant, his occasional stall at a theatre, his easy acquaintance with easy livers of various kinds, had become indispensable to him, and as a matter of course his expenditure increased although his income kept at the same figure. That figure was not contemptible, regard had to the path by which he had come thus far ; Mr Percival esteemed his abilities highly, and behaved to him with generosity. Ten years ago Scawthorne would have lost his senses with joy at the prospect of such a salary ; to-day he found it miserably insufficient to the demands he made upon life. Paltry debts harassed him ; inabilities fretted his temperament and his pride ; it irked him to have no better abode than this musty corner to which he could never invite an acquaintance. And then, notwithstanding his mental endowments, his keen social sense, his native tact, in all London not one refined home was open to him, not one domestic circle of educated people could he approach and find a welcome.

Scawthorne was passing out of the stage when a man seeks only the gratification of his

propensities ; he began to focus his outlook upon the world, and to feel the significance of maturity. The double existence he was compelled to lead,—that of a laborious and clear-brained man of business in office hours, that of a hungry rascal in the time which was his own,—not only impressed him with a sense of danger, but made him profoundly dissatisfied with the unreality of what he called his enjoyments. What, he asked himself, had condemned him to this kind of career ? Simply the weight under which he started, his poor origin, his miserable youth. However carefully regulated his private life had been, his position to-day could not have been other than it was ; no degree of purity would have opened to him the door of a civilised house. Suppose he had wished to marry ; where, pray, was he to find his wife ? A barmaid ? Why, yes, other men of his standing wedded barmaids and girls from the houses of business, and so on ; but they had neither his tastes nor his brains. Never had it been his lot to exchange a word with an educated woman,—save in the office on rare occasions. There is such a thing as self-martyrdom in the cause of personal integrity ;

another man might have said to himself, "Providence forbids me the gratification of my higher instincts, and I must be content to live a life of barrenness, that I may at least be above reproach." True, but Scawthorne happened not to be so made. He was of the rebels of the earth. Formerly he revolted because he could not indulge his senses to their full; at present his ideal was changed, and the past burdened him.

Yesterday he had had an interview with old Mr. Percival which, for the first time in his life, opened to him a prospect of the only kind of advancement conformable with his higher needs. The firm of Percival & Peel was, in truth, Percival & Son, Mr. Peel having been dead for many years; and the son in question lacked a good deal of being the capable lawyer whose exertions could supplement the failing energy of the senior partner. Mr. Percival, having pondered the matter for some time, now proposed that Scawthorne should qualify himself for admission as a solicitor (the circumstances required his being under articles for three years only), and then, if everything were still favourable, accept a junior partnership in

the firm. Such an offer was a testimony of the high regard in which Scawthorne was held by his employer ; it stirred him with hope he had never dared to entertain since his eyes were opened to the realities of the world, and in a single day did more for the ripening of his prudence than years would have effected had his position remained unaltered. Scawthorne realised more distinctly what a hazardous game he had been playing.

And here was this brief note, signed "C. V." An ugly affair to look back upon, all that connected itself with those initials. The worst of it was, that it could not be regarded as done with. Had he anything to fear from "C. V." directly ? The meeting must decide that. He felt now what a fortunate thing it was that his elaborate plot to put an end to the engagement between Kirkwood and Jane Snowdon had been accidentally frustrated,—a plot which *might* have availed himself nothing, even had it succeeded. But was he, in his abandonment of rascality in general, to think no more of the fortune which had so long kept his imagination uneasy ? Had he not, rather, a vastly better chance of getting some of that money into his own

pocket? It really seemed as if Kirkwood—though he might be only artful—had relinquished his claim on the girl, at all events for the present; possibly he was an honest man, which would explain his behaviour. Michael Snowdon could not live much longer; Jane would be the ward of the Percivals, and certainly would be aided to a position more correspondent with her wealth. Why should it then be impossible for *him* to become Jane's husband? Joseph, beyond a doubt, could be brought to favour that arrangement, by means of a private understanding more advantageous to him than anything he could reasonably hope from the girl's merely remaining unmarried. This change in his relations to the Percivals would so far improve his social claims that many of the difficulties hitherto besieging such a scheme as this might easily be set aside. Come, come; the atmosphere was clearing. Joseph himself, now established in a decent business, would become less a fellow-intriguer than an ordinary friend bound to him, in the way of the world, by mutual interests. Things must be put in order; by some device the need of secrecy in his inter-

course with Joseph must come to an end. In fact, there remained but two hazardous points. Could the connection between Jane and Kirkwood be brought definitely to an end. And was anything to be feared from poor "C. V."?

Waterloo Station is a convenient rendezvous; its irregular form provides many corners of retirement, out-of-the-way recesses where talk can be carried on in something like privacy. To one of these secluded spots Scawthorne drew aside with the veiled woman who met him at the entrance from Waterloo Road. So closely was her face shrouded, that he had at first a difficulty in catching the words she addressed to him. The noise of an engine getting up steam, the rattle of cabs and porters' barrows, the tread and voices of a multitude of people made fitting accompaniment to a dialogue which in every word presupposed the corruptions and miseries of a centre of modern life.

"Why did you send that letter to my father?" was Clara's first question.

"Letter? What letter?"

"Wasn't it you who let him know about me?"

“Certainly not. How should I have known his address? When I saw the newspapers, I went down to Bolton and made inquiries. When I heard your father had been, I concluded you had yourself sent for him. Otherwise, I should, of course, have tried to be useful to you in some way. As it was, I supposed you would scarcely thank me for coming forward.”

It might or might not be the truth, as far as Clara was able to decide. Possibly the information had come from some one else. She knew him well enough to be assured by his tone that nothing more could be elicited from him on that point.

“You are quite recovered, I hope?” Scawthorne added, surveying her as she stood in the obscurity. “In your general health?”

He was courteous, somewhat distant.

“I suppose I’m as well as I shall ever be,” she answered coldly. “I asked you to meet me because I wanted to know what it was you spoke of in your last letters. You got my answer, I suppose.”

“Yes, I received your answer. But—in fact, it’s too late. The time has gone by; and

perhaps I was a little hasty in the hopes I held out. I had partly deceived myself."

"Never mind. I wish to know what it was," she said impatiently.

"It can't matter now. Well, there's no harm in mentioning it. Naturally you went out of your way to suppose it was something dishonourable. Nothing of the kind; I had an idea that you might come to terms with an Australian who was looking out for actresses for a theatre in Melbourne,—that was all. But he wasn't quite the man I took him for. I doubt whether it could have been made as profitable as I thought at first."

"You expect me to believe that story?"

"Not unless you like. It's some time since you put any faith in my good-will. The only reason I didn't speak plainly was because I felt sure that the mention of a foreign country would excite your suspicions. You have always attributed evil motives to me rather than good. However, this is not the time to speak of such things. I sympathise with you—deeply. Will you tell me if I can—can help you at all?"

"No, you can't. I wanted to make quite

sure that you were what I thought you, that's all."

"I don't think, on the whole, you have any reason to complain of ill-faith on my part. I secured you the opportunities that are so hard to find."

"Yes, you did. We don't owe each other anything,—that's one comfort. I'll just say that you needn't have any fear I shall trouble you in future; I know that's what you're chiefly thinking about."

"You misjudge me; but that can't be helped. I wish very much it were in my power to be of use to you."

"Thank you."

On that last note of irony they parted. True enough, in one sense, that there remained debt on neither side. But Clara, for all the fierce ambition which had brought her life to this point, could not divest herself of a woman's instincts. That simple fact explained various inconsistencies in her behaviour to Scawthorne since she had made herself independent of him; it explained also why this final interview became the bitterest charge her memory preserved against him.

Her existence for some three weeks kept so gloomy a monotony that it was impossible she should endure it much longer. The little room which she shared at night with Annie and Amy was her cell throughout the day. Of necessity she had made the acquaintance of Mrs. Eagles, but they scarcely saw more of each other than if they had lived in different tenements on the same staircase; she had offered to undertake a share of the housework, but her father knew that everything of the kind was distasteful to her, and Mrs. Eagles continued to assist Amy as hitherto. To save trouble, she came into the middle room for her meals, at these times always keeping as much of her face as possible hidden. The children could not overcome a repulsion, a fear, excited by her veil and the muteness she preserved in their presence; several nights passed before little Annie got to sleep with any comfort. Only with her father did Clara hold converse; in the evening he always sat alone with her for an hour. She went out perhaps every third day, after dark, stealing silently down the long staircase, and walking rapidly until she had escaped the neighbour-

hood, — like John Hewett when formerly he wandered forth in search of her. Her strength was slight; after half-an-hour's absence she came back so wearied that the ascent of stairs cost her much suffering.

The economy prevailing in to-day's architecture takes good care that no depressing circumstance shall be absent from the dwellings in which the poor find shelter. What terrible barracks, those Farringdon Road Buildings! Vast, sheer walls, unbroken by even an attempt at ornament; row above row of windows in the mud-coloured surface, upwards, upwards, lifeless eyes, mirky openings that tell of bareness, disorder, comfortlessness within. One is tempted to say that Shooter's Gardens are a preferable abode. An inner courtyard, asphalted, swept clean,—looking up to the sky as from a prison. Acres of these edifices, the tinge of grime declaring the relative dates of their erection; millions of tons of brute brick and mortar, crushing the spirit as you gaze. Barracks, in truth; housing for the army of industrialism, an army fighting with itself, rank against rank, man against man, that the survivors may have

whereon to feed. Pass by in the night, and strain imagination to picture the weltering mass of human weariness, of bestiality, of unmerited dolour, of hopeless hope, of crushed surrender, tumbled together within those forbidding walls.

Clara hated the place from her first hour in it. It seemed to her that the air was poisoned with the odour of an unclean crowd. The yells of children at play in the courtyard tortured her nerves; the regular sounds on the staircase, day after day repeated at the same hours, incidents of the life of poverty, irritated her sick brain and filled her with despair to think that as long as she lived she could never hope to rise again above this world to which she was born. Gone for ever, for ever, the promise that always gleamed before her whilst she had youth and beauty and talent. With the one, she felt as though she had been robbed of all three blessings; her twenty years were now a meaningless figure; the energies of her mind could avail no more than an idiot's mummary. For the author of her calamity she nourished no memory of hatred: her resentment was

against the fate which had cursed her existence from its beginning.

For this she had dared everything, had made the supreme sacrifice. Conscience had nothing to say to her, but she felt herself an outcast even among these wretched toilers whose swarming aroused her disgust. Given the success which had been all but in her grasp, and triumphant pride would have scored out every misgiving as to the cost at which the victory had been won. Her pride was unbroken ; under the stress of anguish it became a scorn for goodness and humility ; but in the desolation of her future she read a punishment equal to the daring wherewith she had aspired. Excepting her poor old father, not a living soul that held account of her. She might live for years and years. Her father would die, and then no smallest tribute of love or admiration would be hers for ever. More than that ; perforce she must gain her own living, and in doing so she must expose herself to all manner of insulting wonder and pity. Was it a life that could be lived ?

Hour after hour she sat with her face buried in her hands. She did not weep ; tears were

trivial before a destiny such as this. But groans and smothered cries often broke the silence of her solitude,—cries of frenzied revolt, wordless curses. Once she rose up suddenly, passed through the middle room, and out on to the staircase ; there a gap in the wall, guarded by iron railings breast-high, looked down upon the courtyard. She leaned forward over the bar and measured the distance that separated her from the ground ; a ghastly height ! Surely one would not feel much after such a fall ? In any case, the crashing agony of but an instant. Had not this place tempted other people before now ?

Some one coming upstairs made her shrink back into her room. She had felt the horrible fascination of that sheer depth, and thought of it for days, thought of it until she dreaded to quit the tenement, lest a power distinct from will should seize and hurl her to destruction. She knew that that must not happen here ; for all her self-absorption, she could not visit with such cruelty the one heart that loved her. And thinking of him, she understood that her father's tenderness was not wholly the idle thing that it had been to her at first ; her love could never

equal his, had never done so in her childhood, but she grew conscious of a soothing power in the gentle and timid devotion with which he tended her. His appearance of an evening was something more than a relief after the waste of hours which made her day. The rough, passionate man made himself as quiet and sympathetic as a girl when he took his place by her. Compared with her, his other children were as nothing to him. Impossible that Clara should not be touched by the sense that he who had everything to forgive, whom she had despised and abandoned, behaved now as one whose part it is to beseech forgiveness. She became less impatient when he tried to draw her into conversation; when he held her thin soft hand in those rude ones of his, she knew a solace in which there was something of gratitude.

Yet it was John who revived her misery in its worst form. Pitying her unoccupied loneliness, he brought home one day a book that he had purchased from a stall in Farringdon Street; it was a novel (with a picture on the cover which seemed designed to repel any person not wholly without taste), and might perhaps serve the end of averting her thoughts

from their one subject. Clara viewed it contemptuously, but made a show of being thankful, and on the next day she did glance at its pages. The story was better than its illustration ; it took a hold upon her ; she read all day long. But when she returned to herself, it was to find that she had been exasperating her heart's malady. The book dealt with people of wealth and refinement, with the world to which she had all her life been aspiring, and to which she might have attained. The meanness of her surroundings became in comparison more mean, the bitterness of her fate more bitter. You must not lose sight of the fact that since abandoning her work-girl existence Clara had been constantly educating herself, not only by direct study of books, but, through her association with people, her growth in experience. Where in the old days of rebellion she had only an instinct, a divination to guide her, there was now just enough of knowledge to give occupation to her developed intellect and taste. Far keener was her sense of the loss she had suffered than her former longing for what she knew only in dream. The activity of her mind received a new

impulse when she broke free from Scawthorne and began her upward struggle in independence. Whatever books were obtainable she read greedily ; she purchased numbers of plays in the acting-editions, and studied with the utmost earnestness such parts as she knew by repute ; no actress entertained a more superb ambition, none was more vividly conscious of power. But it was not only at stage-triumph that Clara aimed ; glorious in itself, this was also to serve her as a means of becoming nationalised among that race of beings whom birth and breeding exalt above the multitude. A notable illusion ; pathetic to dwell upon. As a work-girl, she nourished envious hatred of those the world taught her to call superiors ; they were then as remote and unknown to her as gods on Olympus. From her place behind the footlights she surveyed the occupants of boxes and stalls in a changed spirit ; the distance was no longer insuperable ; she heard of fortunate players who mingled on equal terms with men and women of refinement. There, she imagined, was her ultimate goal. “ It is to *them* that I belong ! Be my origin what it may, I have the intelligence and the desires

of one born to freedom. Nothing in me, nothing, is akin to that gross world from which I have escaped!" So she thought — with every drop of her heart's blood crying its source from that red fountain of revolt whereon never yet did the upper daylight gleam! Brain and pulses such as hers belong not to the mild breed of mortals fostered in sunshine. But for the stroke of fate, she might have won that reception which was in her dream, and with what self-mockery when experience had matured itself! Never yet did true rebel, who has burst the barriers of social limitation, find aught but ennui in the trim gardens beyond.

When John asked if the book had given her amusement, she said that reading made her eyes ache. He noticed that her hand felt feverish, and that the dark mood had fallen upon her as badly as ever to-night.

"It's just what I said," she exclaimed with abruptness, after long refusal to speak. "I knew your friend would never come as long as I was here."

John regarded her anxiously. The phrase "your friend" had a peculiar sound that disturbed him. It made him aware that she had

been thinking often of Sidney Kirkwood since his name had been dismissed from their conversation. He, too, had often turned his mind uneasily in the same direction, wondering whether he ought to have spoken of Sidney so freely. At the time it seemed best, indeed almost inevitable; but habit and the force of affection were changing his view of Clara in several respects. He recognised the impossibility of her continuing to live as now, yet it was as difficult as ever to conceive a means of aiding her. Unavoidably he kept glancing towards Kirkwood. He knew that Sidney was no longer a free man; he knew that, even had it been otherwise, Clara could be nothing to him. In spite of facts, the father kept brooding on what might have been. His own love was perdurable; how could it other than intensify when its object was so unhappy? His hot, illogical mood all but brought about a revival of the old resentment against Sidney.

“I haven’t seen him for a week or two,” he replied, in an embarrassed way.

“Did he tell you he shouldn’t come?”

“No. After we’d talked about it, you know, —when you told me you didn’t mind,—I just

said a word or two ; and he nodded, that was all."

She became silent. John, racked by doubts as to whether he should say more of Sidney or still hold his peace, sat rubbing the back of one hand with the other and looking about the room.

"Father," Clara resumed presently, "what became of that child at Mrs. Peckover's, that her grandfather came and took away? Snowdon ; yes, that was her name ; Jane Snowdon."

"You remember they went to live with somebody you used to know," John replied, with hesitation. "They're still in the same house."

"So she's grown up. Did you ever hear about that old man having a lot of money?"

"Why, my dear, I never heard nothing but what them Peckovers talked at the time. But there was a son of his turned up as seemed to have some money. He married Mrs. Peckover's daughter."

Clara expressed surprise.

"A son of his? Not the girl's father?"

"Yes ; her father. I don't know nothing about his history. It's for him, or partly for

him, as I'm workin' now, Clara. The firm's Lake, Snowdon, & Co."

"Why didn't you mention it before?"

"I don't hardly know, my dear."

She looked at him, aware that something was being kept back.

"Tell me about the girl. What does she do?"

"She goes to work, I believe; but I haven't heard much about her since a good time. Sidney Kirkwood's a friend of her grandfather. He often goes there, I believe."

"What is she like?" Clara asked, after a pause. "She used to be such a weak, ailing thing, I never thought she'd grow up. What's she like to look at?"

"I can't tell you, my dear. I don't know as ever I see her since those times."

Again a silence.

"Then it's Mr. Kirkwood that has told you what you know of her?"

"Why, no. It was chiefly Mrs. Peckover told me. She did say, Clara,—but then I can't tell whether it's true or not,—she did say something about Sidney and her."

He spoke with difficulty, feeling constrained

to make the disclosure, but anxious as to its result. Clara made no movement, seemed to have heard with indifference.

“It’s maybe partly ’cause of that,” added John, in a low voice, “that he doesn’t like to come here.”

“Yes ; I understand.”

They spoke no more on the subject.

CHAPTER IV.

WOMAN AND ACTRESS.

IN a tenement on the same staircase, two floors below, lived a family with whom John Hewett was on friendly terms. Necessity calling these people out of London for a few days, they had left with John the key of their front door; a letter of some moment might arrive in their absence, and John undertook to re-post it to them. The key was hung on a nail in Clara's room.

"I'll just go down and see if the postman's left anything at Mrs. Holland's this morning," said Amy Hewett, coming in between breakfast and the time of starting for school.

She reached up to the key, but Clara, who sat by the fire with a cup of tea on her lap, the only breakfast she ever took, surprised her by saying, "You needn't trouble, Amy. I shall be going out soon, and I'll look in as I pass."

The girl was disappointed, for she liked this private incursion into the abode of other people, but the expression of a purpose by her sister was so unusual that, after a moment's hesitating, she said, "Very well," and left the room again.

When silence informed Clara that the children were gone, Mrs. Eagles being the only person besides herself who remained in the tenement, she put on her hat, drew down the veil which was always attached to it, and with the key in her hand descended to the Hollands' rooms. Had a letter been delivered that morning, it would have been—in default of box—just inside the door; there was none, but Clara seemed to have another purpose in view. She closed the door and walked forward into the nearest room; the blind was down, but the dusk thus produced was familiar to her in consequence of her own habit, and, her veil thrown back, she examined the chamber thoughtfully. It was a sitting-room, ugly, orderly; the air felt damp, and even in semi-darkness she was conscious of the layers of London dust which had softly deposited themselves since the family went away forty-eight hours ago. A

fire was laid ready for lighting, and the smell of moist soot spread from the grate. Having stood on one spot for nearly ten minutes, Clara made a quick movement and withdrew ; she latched the front door with as little noise as possible, ran upstairs and shut herself again in her own room.

Presently she was standing at her window, the blind partly raised. On a clear day the view from this room was of wide extent, embracing a great part of the City ; seen under a low, blurred, dripping sky, through the ragged patches of smoke from chimneys innumerable, it had a gloomy impressiveness well in keeping with the mind of her who brooded over it. Directly in front, rising mist-detached from the lower masses of building, stood in black majesty the dome of St. Paul's ; its vastness suffered no diminution from this high outlook, rather was exaggerated by the flying scraps of mirky vapour which softened its outline and at times gave it the appearance of floating on a vague troubled sea. Somewhat nearer, amid many spires and steeples, lay the surly bulk of Newgate, the lines of its construction shown plan-wise ; its

little windows multiplied for points of torment to the vision. Nearer again, the markets of Smithfield, Bartholomew's Hospital, the tract of modern deformity, cleft by a gulf of railway, which spreads between Clerkenwell Road and Charterhouse Street. Down in Farringdon Street the carts, waggons, vans, cabs, omnibuses, crossed and intermingled in a steaming splash-bath of mud; human beings, reduced to their due paltriness, seemed to toil in exasperation along the strips of pavement, bound on errands which were a mockery, driven automaton-like by forces they neither understood nor could resist.

“Can I go out into a world like that—alone?” was the thought which made Clara's spirit fail as she stood gazing. “Can I face life as it is for women who grow old in earning bare daily bread among those terrible streets? Year after year to go in and out from some wretched garret that I call home, with my face hidden, my heart stabbed with misery till it is cold and bloodless!”

Then her eye fell upon the spire of St. James's Church, on Clerkenwell Green, whose bells used to be so familiar to her. The

memory was only of discontent and futile aspiration, but—Oh, if it were possible to be again as she was then, and yet keep the experience with which life had since endowed her ! With no moral condemnation did she view the records of her rebellion ; but how easy to see now that ignorance had been one of the worst obstacles in her path, and that, like all unadvised purchasers, she had paid a price that might well have been spared. A little more craft, a little more patience,—it is with these that the world is conquered. The world was her enemy, and had proved too strong ; woman though she was,—only a girl striving to attain the place for which birth adapted her,—pursuing only her irrepressible instincts,—fate flung her to the ground pitilessly, and bade her live out the rest of her time in wretchedness.

No ! There remained one more endeavour that was possible to her, one bare hope of saving herself from the extremity which only now she estimated at its full horror. If that failed, why, then, there was a way to cure all ills.

From her box, that in which were hidden away many heart-breaking mementoes of her life as an actress, she took out a sheet of

notepaper and an envelope. Without much thought, she wrote nearly three pages, folded the letter, addressed it with a name only : "Mr. Kirkwood." Sidney's address she did not know ; her father had mentioned Red Lion Street, that was all. She did not even know whether he still worked at the old place, but in that way she must try to find him. She cloaked herself, took her umbrella, and went out.

At a corner of St. John's Square she soon found an urchin who would run an errand for her. He was to take this note to a house that she indicated, and to ask if Mr. Kirkwood was working there. She scarcely durst hope to see the messenger returning with empty hands, but he did so. A terrible throbbing at her heart, she went home again.

In the evening, when her father returned, she surprised him by saying that she expected a visitor.

"Do you want me to go out of the way?" he asked, eager to submit to her in everything.

"No. I've asked my friend to come to Mrs. Holland's. I thought there would be no great harm. I shall go down just before nine o'clock."

"Oh no, there's no harm," conceded her

father. "It's only if the neighbours opposite got talkin' to them when they come back."

"I can't help it. They won't mind. I can't help it."

John noticed her agitated repetition, the impatience with which she flung aside difficulties.

"Clara,—it ain't anything about work, my dear?"

"No, father. I wouldn't do anything without telling you; I've promised."

"Then I don't care; it's all right."

She had begun to speak immediately on his entering the room, and so it happened that he had not kissed her as he always did at home-coming. When she had sat down, he came with awkwardness and timidity and bent his face to hers.

"What a hot cheek it is to-night, my little girl!" he murmured. "I don't like it; you've got a bit of fever hangin' about you."

She wished to be alone; the children must not come into the room until she had gone downstairs. When her father had left her, she seated herself before the looking-glass, abhorrent as it was to her to look thus in her own face, and began dressing her hair with

quite unusual attention. This beauty at least remained to her; arranged as she had learned to do it for the stage, the dark abundance of her tresses crowned nobly the head which once held itself with such defiant grace. She did not change her dress, which, though it had suffered from wear, was well-fitting and of better material than Farringdon Road Buildings were wont to see; a sober draping which became her tall elegance as she moved. At a quarter to nine she arranged the veil upon her head so that she could throw her hat aside without disturbing it; then, taking the lamp in her hand, and the key of the Hollands' door, she went forth.

No one met her on the stairs. She was safe in the cold deserted parlour where she had stood this morning. Cold, doubtless, but she could not be conscious of it; in her veins there seemed rather to be fire than blood. Her brain was clear, but in an unnatural way; the throbbing at her temples ought to have been painful, but only excited her with a strange intensity of thought. And she felt, amid it all, a dread of what was before her; only the fever, to which she abandoned herself with a

sort of reckless confidence, a faith that it would continue till this interview was over, overcame an impulse to rush back into her hiding-place, to bury herself in shame, or desperately overwhelm her wretchedness in the final oblivion. . . .

He was very punctual. The heavy bell of St. Paul's had not reached its ninth stroke when she heard his knock at the door.

He came in without speaking, and stood as if afraid to look at her. The lamp, placed on a side-table, barely disclosed all the objects within the four walls; it illumined Sidney's face, but Clara moved so that she was in shadow. She began to speak.

"You understood my note? The people who live here are away, and I have ventured to borrow their room. They are friends of my father's."

At the first word, he was surprised by the change in her voice and accentuation. Her speech was that of an educated woman; the melody which always had such a charm for him had gained wonderfully in richness. Yet it was with difficulty that she commanded utterance, and her agitation touched him in a way quite other than he was prepared for. In

truth, he knew not what experience he had anticipated, but the reality, now that it came, this unimaginable blending of memory with the unfamiliar, this refinement of something that he had loved, this note of pity struck within him by such subtle means, affected his inmost self. Immediately he laid stern control upon his feelings, but all the words which he had designed to speak were driven from memory. He could say nothing, could only glance at her veiled face and await what she had to ask of him.

“Will you sit down? I shall feel grateful if you can spare me a few minutes. I have asked you to see me because—indeed, because I am sadly in want of the kind of help a friend might give me. I don’t venture to call you that, but I thought of you; I hoped you wouldn’t refuse to let me speak to you. I am in such difficulties—such a hard position”——

“You may be very sure I will do anything I can to be of use to you,” Sidney replied, his thick voice contrasting so strongly with that which had just failed into silence that he coughed and lowered his tone after the first few syllables. He meant to express himself

without a hint of emotion, but it was beyond his power. The words in which she spoke of her calamity seemed so pathetically simple that they went to his heart. Clara had recovered all her faculties. The fever and the anguish and the dread were no whit diminished, but they helped instead of checking her. An actress improvising her part, she regulated every tone with perfect skill, with inspiration; the very attitude in which she seated herself was a triumph of the artist's felicity.

"I just said a word or two in my note," she resumed, "that you might have replied if you thought nothing could be gained by my speaking to you. I couldn't explain fully what I had in mind. I don't know that I've anything very clear to say even now, but—you know what has happened to me; you know that I have nothing to look forward to, that I can only hope to keep from being a burden to my father. I am getting stronger; it's time I tried to find something to do. But I"—

Her voice failed again. Sidney gazed at her, and saw the dull lamplight just glisten on her hair. She was bending forward a little, her hands joined and resting on her knee.

“Have you thought what kind of—of work would be best for you?” Sidney asked. The “work” stuck in his throat, and he seemed to himself brutal in his way of uttering it. But he was glad when he had put the question thus directly; one at least of his resolves was carried out.

“I know I’ve no right to choose, when there’s necessity,” she answered, in a very low tone. “Most women would naturally think of needlework; but I know so little of it; I scarcely ever did any. If I could—I might perhaps do that at home, and I feel—if I could only avoid—if I could only be spared going among strangers”——

Her faltering voice sank lower and lower; she seemed as if she would have hidden her face even under its veil.

“I feel sure you will have no difficulty,” Sidney hastened to reply, his own voice unsteady. “Certainly you can get work at home. Why do you trouble yourself with the thought of going among strangers? There’ll never be the least need for that; I’m sure there won’t. Haven’t you spoken about it to your father?”

“Yes. But he is so kind to me that he won’t hear of work at all. It was partly on that account that I took the step of appealing to you. He doesn’t know who I am meeting here to-night. Would you—I don’t know whether I ought to ask—but perhaps if you spoke to him in a day or two, and made him understand how strong my wish is. He dreads lest we should be parted, but I hope I shall never have to leave him. And then, of course, father is not very well able to advise me—about work, I mean. You have more experience. I am so helpless. Oh, if you knew how helpless I feel!”

“If you really wish it, I will talk with your father”——

“Indeed, I do wish it. My coming to live here has made everything so uncomfortable for him and the children. Even his friends can’t visit him as they would; I feel that, though he won’t admit that it’s made any difference.”

Sidney looked to the ground. He heard her voice falter as it continued.

“If I’m to live here still, it mustn’t be at the cost of all his comfort. I keep almost

always in the one room. I shouldn't be in the way if any one came. I've been afraid, Mr. Kirkwood, that perhaps you feared to come lest, whilst I was not very well, it might have been an inconvenience to us. Please don't think that. I shall never—see either friends or strangers unless it is absolutely needful."

There was silence.

"You do feel much better, I hope?" fell from Sidney's lips.

"Much stronger. It's only my mind; everything is so dark to me. You know how little patience I always had. It was enough if any one said, '*You must do this,*' or '*You must put up with that,*'—at once I resisted. It was my nature; I couldn't bear the feeling of control. That's what I've had to struggle with since I recovered from my delirium at the hospital, and hadn't even the hope of dying. Can you put yourself in my place, and imagine what I have suffered?"

Sidney was silent. His own life had not been without its passionate miseries, but the modulations of this voice which had no light of countenance to aid it raised him above the

plane of common experience and made actual to him the feelings he knew only in romantic story. He could not stir, lest the slightest sound should jar on her speaking. His breath rose visibly upon the chill air, but the discomfort of the room was as indifferent to him as to his companion. Clara rose, as if impelled by mental anguish; she stretched out her hand to the mantelpiece, and so stood, between him and the light, her admirable figure designed on a glimmering background.

"I know why you say nothing," she continued, abruptly but without resentment. "You cannot use words of sympathy which would be anything but formal, and you prefer to let me understand that. It is like you. Oh, you mustn't think I mean the phrase as a reproach. Anything but that. I mean that you were always honest, and time hasn't changed you—in that." A slight, very slight, tremor on the close. "I'd rather you behaved to me like your old self. A sham sympathy would drive me mad."

"I said nothing," he replied, "only because words seemed meaningless."

"Not only that. You feel for me, I know,

because you are not heartless ; but at the same time you obey your reason, which tells you that all I suffer comes of my own self-will."

"I should like you to think better of me than that. I'm not one of those people, I hope, who use every accident to point a moral, and begin by inventing the moral to suit their own convictions. I know all the details of your misfortune."

"Oh, wasn't it cruel that she should take such revenge upon me!" Her voice rose in unrestrained emotion. "Just because she envied me that poor bit of advantage over her! How could I be expected to refuse the chance that was offered? It would have been no use; she couldn't have kept the part. And I was so near success. I had never had a chance of showing what I could do. It wasn't much of a part, really, but it was the lead, at all events, and it would have made people pay attention to me. You don't know how strongly I was always drawn to the stage; there I found the work for which I was meant. And I strove so hard to make my way. I had no friends, no money. I earned only just enough to supply my needs. I know what

people think about actresses. Mr. Kirkwood, do you imagine I have been living at my ease, congratulating myself that I had escaped from all hardships?"

He could not raise his eyes. As she still awaited his answer, he said in rather a hard voice :

"As I have told you, I read all the details that were published."

"Then you know that I was working hard and honestly,—working far, far harder than when I lived in Clerkenwell Close. But I don't know why I am talking to you about it. It's all over. I went my own way, and I all but won what I fought for. You may very well say, what's the use of mourning over one's fate?"

Sidney had risen.

"You were strong in your resolve to succeed," he said gravely, "and you will find strength to meet even this trial."

"A weaker woman would suffer far less. One with a little more strength of character would kill herself."

"No. In that you mistake. You have not yourself only to think of. It would be an

easy thing to put an end to your life. You have a duty to your father."

She bent her head.

"I think of him. He is goodness itself to me. There are fathers who would have shut the door in my face. I know better now than I could when I was only a child how hard his life has been; he and I are like each other in so many ways; he has always been fighting against cruel circumstances. It's right that you, who have been his true and helpful friend, should remind me of my duty to him."

A pause; then Sidney asked:

"Do you wish me to speak to him very soon about your finding occupation?"

"If you will. If you could think of anything."

He moved, but still delayed his offer to take leave.

"You said just now," Clara continued, falteringly, "that you did not try to express sympathy, because words seemed of no use. How am I to find words of thanks to you for coming here and listening to what I had to say?"

"But surely so simple an act of friendship"——

“Have I so many friends? And what right have I to look to you for an act of kindness? Did I merit it by my words when I last”——

There came a marvellous change—a change such as it needed either exquisite feeling or the genius of simulation to express by means so simple. Unable to show him by a smile, by a light in her eyes, what mood had come upon her, what subtle shifting in the direction of her thought had checked her words,—by her mere movement as she stepped lightly towards him, by the carriage of her head, by her hands half held out and half drawn back again, she prepared him for what she was about to say. No piece of acting was ever more delicately finished. He knew that she smiled, though nothing of her face was visible; he knew that her look was one of diffident, half-blushing pleasure. And then came the sweetness of her accents, timorous, joyful, scarcely to be recognised as the voice which an instant ago had trembled sadly in self-reproach.

“But that seems to you so long ago, doesn’t it? You can forgive me now. Father has told me what happiness you have found, and I—I am so glad!”

Sidney drew back a step, involuntarily ; the movement came of the shock with which he heard her make such confident reference to the supposed relations between himself and Jane Snowdon. He reddened—stood mute. For a few seconds his mind was in the most painful whirl and conflict ; a hundred impressions, arguments, apprehensions, crowded upon him, each with its puncturing torment. And Clara stood there waiting for his reply, in the attitude of consummate grace.

“Of course I know what you speak of,” he said at length, with the bluntness of confusion. “But your father was mistaken. I don’t know who can have led him to believe that—— It’s a mistake, altogether.”

Sidney would not have believed that any one could so completely rob him of self-possession, least of all Clara Hewett. His face grew still more heated. He was angry with he knew not whom, he knew not why,—perhaps with himself in the first instance.

“A mistake ?” Clara murmured, under her breath. “Oh, you mean people have been too hasty in speaking about it. Do pardon me.

I ought never to have taken such a liberty,—
but I felt ”——

She hesitated.

“It was no liberty at all. I dare say the mistake is natural enough to those who know nothing of Miss Snowdon’s circumstances. I myself, however, have no right to talk about her. But what you have been told is absolute error.”

Clara walked a few paces aside.

“Again I ask you to forgive me.” Her tones had not the same clearness as hitherto. “In any case, I had no right to approach such a subject in speaking with you.”

“Let us put it aside,” said Sidney, mastering himself. “We were just agreeing that I should see your father, and make known your wish to him.”

“Thank you. I shall tell him, when I go upstairs, that you were the friend whom I had asked to come here. I felt it to be so uncertain whether you would come.”

“I hope you couldn’t seriously doubt it.”

“You teach me to tell the truth. No. I knew too well your kindness. I knew that even to me ”——

Sidney could converse no longer. He felt the need of being alone, to put his thoughts in order, to resume his experiences during this strange hour. An extreme weariness was possessing him, as though he had been straining his intellect in attention to some difficult subject. And all at once the dank, cold atmosphere of the room struck into his blood ; he had a fit of trembling.

“Let us say good-bye for the present.”

Clara gave her hand silently. He touched it for the first time, and could not but notice its delicacy ; it was very warm, too, and moist. Without speaking she went with him to the outer door. His footsteps sounded along the stone staircase ; Clara listened until the last echo was silent.

She too had begun to feel the chilly air. Hastily putting on her hat, she took up the lamp, glanced round the room to see that nothing was left in disorder, and hastened up to the fifth storey.

In the middle room, through which she had to pass, her father and Mr. Eagles were talking together. The latter gave her a “good-evening,” respectful, almost as to a social

superior. Within, Amy and Annie were just going to bed. She sat with them in her usual silence for a quarter of an hour, then, having ascertained that Eagles was gone into his own chamber, went out to speak to her father.

“My friend came,” she said. “Do you suspect who it was?”

“Why, no, I can’t guess, Clara.”

“Haven’t you thought of Mr. Kirkwood?”

“You don’t mean that?”

“Father, you are quite mistaken about Jane Snowden—quite.”

John started up from his seat.

“Has he told you so, himself?”

“Yes. But listen; you are not to say a word on that subject to him. You will be very careful, father?”

John gazed at her wonderingly. She kissed his forehead, and withdrew to the other room.

CHAPTER V.

A HAVEN.

JOHN HEWETT no longer had membership in club or society. The loss of his insurance-money made him for the future regard all such institutions with angry suspicion. "Workin' men ain't satisfied with bein' robbed by the upper classes; they must go and rob one another." He had said good-bye to Clerkenwell Green; the lounging crowd no longer found amusement in listening to his frenzied voice and in watching the contortions of his rugged features. He discussed the old subjects with Eagles, but the latter's computational mind was out of sympathy with zeal of the tumid description; though quite capable of working himself into madness on the details of the Budget, John was easily soothed by his friend's calmer habits of debate. Kirkwood's influence, moreover, was again exerting itself

upon him,—an influence less than ever likely to encourage violence of thought or speech. In Sidney's company the worn rebel became almost placid; his rude, fretted face fell into a singular humility and mildness. Having ended by accepting what he would formerly have called charity, and that from a man whom he had wronged with obstinate perverseness, John neither committed the error of obtruding his gratitude, nor yet suffered it to be imagined that obligation sat upon him too lightly. He put no faith in Sidney's assertion that some unknown benefactor was to be thanked for the new furniture; one and the same pocket had supplied that and the money for Mrs. Hewett's burial. Gratitude was all very well, but he could not have rested without taking some measures towards a literal repayment of his debt. The weekly coppers which had previously gone for club subscriptions were now put away in a money-box; they would be long enough in making an appreciable sum, but yet, if he himself could never discharge the obligation, his children must take it up after him, and this he frequently impressed upon Amy, Annie, and Tom.

Nothing, however, could have detached John's mind so completely from its habits of tumult, nor have fixed it so firmly upon the interests of home, as his recovery of his daughter. From the day of Clara's establishment under his roof he thought of her, and of her only. Whilst working at the filter-factory he remained in imagination by her side, ceaselessly repeating her words of the night before, eagerly looking for the hour that would allow him to return to her. Joy and trouble mingled in an indescribable way to constitute his ordinary mood; one moment he would laugh at a thought, and before a companion could glance at him his gladness would be overshadowed as if with the heaviest anxiety. Men who saw him day after day said at this time that he seemed to be growing childish; he muttered to himself a good deal, and looked blankly at you when you addressed him. In the course of a fortnight his state became more settled, but it was not the cheerful impulse that predominated. Out of the multitude of thoughts concerning Clara, one had fixed itself as the main controller of his reflection. Characteristically, John hit upon

what seemed an irremediable misfortune, and brooded over it with all his might. If only Sidney Kirkwood were in the same mind as four years ago!

And now was he to believe that what he had been told about Sidney and Jane Snowden was misleading? Was the impossible no longer so? He almost leapt from his chair when he heard that Sidney was the visitor with whom his daughter had been having her private conversation. How came they to make this appointment? There was something in Clara's voice that set his nerves a-tremble. That night he could not sleep, and next morning he went to work with a senile quiver in his body. For the first time for more than two months he turned into a public-house on his way, just to give himself a little "tone." The natural result of such a tonic was to heighten the fever of his imagination; goodness knows how far he had got in a drama of happiness before he threw off his coat and settled to his day's labour.

Clara, in the meanwhile, suffered a corresponding agitation, more penetrative in proportion to the finer substance of her nature.

She did not know until the scene was over how much vital force it had cost her ; when she took off the veil a fire danced before her eyes, and her limbs ached and trembled as she lay down in the darkness. All night long she was acting her part over and over ; when she woke up, it was always at the point where Sidney replied to her, “ But you are mistaken ! ”

Acting her part ; yes, but a few hours had turned the make-believe into something earnest enough. She could not now have met Kirkwood with the self-possession of last evening. The fever that then sustained her was much the same as she used to know before she had thoroughly accustomed herself to appearing in front of an audience ; it exalted all her faculties, gifted her with a remarkable self-consciousness. It was all very well as long as there was need of it, but why did it afflict her in this torturing form now that she desired to rest, to think of what she had gained, of what hope she might reasonably nourish ? The purely selfish project which, in her desperation, had seemed the only resource remaining to her against a life of intolerable desolateness, was taking hold upon her in a way she could not

understand. Had she not already made a discovery that surpassed all expectation? Sidney Kirkwood was not bound to another woman; why could she not accept that as so much clear gain, and deliberate as to her next step? She had been fully prepared for the opposite state of things, prepared to strive against any odds, to defy all probabilities, all restraints; why not thank her fortune and plot collectedly now that the chances were so much improved?

But from the beginning of her interview with him, Clara knew that something more entered into her designs on Sidney than a cold self-interest. She had never loved him; she never loved any one; yet the inclinations of her early girlhood had been drawn by the force of the love he offered her, and to this day she thought of him with a respect and liking such as she had for no other man. When she heard from her father that Sidney had forgotten her, had found some one by whom his love was prized, her instant emotion was so like a pang of jealousy that she marvelled at it. Suppose fate had prospered her, and she had heard in the midst of triumphs that Sidney Kirkwood, the working man in Clerkenwell, was going to

marry a girl he loved, would any feeling of this kind have come to her? Her indifference would have been complete. It was calamity that made her so sensitive. Self-pity longs for the compassion of others. That Sidney, who was once her slave, should stand aloof in freedom now that she wanted sympathy so sorely, this was a wound to her heart. That other woman had robbed her of something she could not spare.

Jane Snowdon, too! She found it scarcely conceivable that the wretched little starveling of Mrs. Peckover's kitchen should have grown into anything that a man like Sidney could love. To be sure, there was a mystery in her lot. Clara remembered perfectly how Scawthorne pointed out of the cab at the old man Snowdon, and said that he was very rich. A miser, or what? More she had never tried to discover. Now Sidney himself had hinted at something in Jane's circumstances which, he professed, put it out of the question that he could contemplate marrying her. Had he told her the truth? Could she in fact consider him free? Might there not be some reason for his wishing to keep a secret?

With burning temples, with feverish lips, she moved about her little room like an animal in a cage, finding the length of the day intolerable. She was constrained to inaction, when it seemed to her that every moment in which she did not do something to keep Sidney in mind of her was worse than lost. Could she not see that girl, Jane Snowdon? But was not Sidney's denial as emphatic as it could be? She recalled his words, and tried numberless interpretations. Would anything that he had said bear being interpreted as a sign that something of the old tenderness still lived in him? And the strange thing was, that she interrogated herself on these points not at all like a coldly scheming woman, who aims at something that is to be won, if at all, by the subtlest practising on another's emotions, whilst she remains unaffected. Rather like a woman who loves passionately, whose ardour and jealous dread wax moment by moment.

For what was she scheming? For food, clothing, assured comfort during her life? Twenty-four hours ago Clara would most likely have believed that she had indeed fallen to this; but the meeting with Sidney

enlightened her. Least of all women could *she* live by bread alone ; there was the hunger of her brain, the hunger of her heart. I spoke once, you remember, of her “ defect of tenderness ; ” the fault remained, but her heart was no longer so sterile of the tender emotions as when revolt and ambition absorbed all her energies. She had begun to feel gently towards her father ; it was an intimation of the need which would presently bring all the forces of her nature into play. She dreaded a life of drudgery ; she dreaded humiliation among her inferiors ; but that which she feared most of all was the barrenness of a lot into which would enter none of the passionate joys of existence. Speak to Clara of renunciation, of saintly glories, of the stony way of perfectness, and you addressed her in an unknown tongue ; nothing in her responded to these ideas. Hopelessly defeated in the one way of aspiration which promised a large life, her being, rebellious against the martyrdom it had suffered, went forth eagerly towards the only happiness which was any longer attainable. Her beauty was a dead thing ; never by that means could she command homage. But there is love, ay,

and passionate love, which can be independent of mere charm of face. In one man only could she hope to inspire it; successful in that, she would taste victory, and even in this fallen estate could make for herself a dominion.

In these few hours she so wrought upon her imagination as to believe that the one love of her life had declared itself. She revived every memory she possibly could of those years on the far side of the gulf, and convinced herself that even then she had loved Sidney. Other love of a certainty she had not known. In standing face to face with him after so long an interval, she recognised the qualities which used to impress her, and appraised them as formerly she could not. His features had gained in attractiveness; the refinement which made them an index to his character was more noticeable at the first glance, or perhaps she was better able to distinguish it. The slight bluntness in his manner reminded her of the moral force which she had known only as something to be resisted; it was now one of the influences that drew her to him. Had she not always admitted that he stood far above the other men of his class whom she

used to know? Between his mind and hers there was distinct kinship; the sense that he had both power and right to judge her explained in a great measure her attitude of defiance towards him when she was determined to break away from her humble conditions. All along, had not one of her main incentives to work and strive been the resolve to justify herself in *his* view, to prove to *him* that she possessed talent, to show herself to *him* as one whom the world admired? The repugnance with which she thought of meeting him, when she came home with her father, meant in truth that she dreaded to be assured that he could only shrink from her.

All her vital force setting in this wild current, her self-deception complete, she experienced the humility of supreme egoism,—that state wherein self multiplies its claims to pity in passionate support of its demand for the object of desire. She felt capable of throwing herself at Sidney's feet, and imploring him not to withdraw from her the love of which he had given her so many assurances. She gazed at her scarred face until the image was blurred with tears; then, as though there were luxury

in weeping, sobbed for an hour, crouching down in a corner of her room. Even though his love were as dead as her beauty, must he not be struck to the heart with compassion, realising her woeful lot? She asked nothing more eagerly than to humiliate herself before him, to confess that her pride was broken. Not a charge he could bring against her but she would admit its truth. Had she been humble enough last night? When he came again—and he must soon—she would throw aside every vestige of dignity, lest he should think that she was strong enough to bear her misery alone. No matter how poor-spirited she seemed, if only she could move his sympathies.

Poor rebel heart! Beat for beat, in these moments it matched itself with that of the purest woman who surrenders to a despairing love. Had one charged her with insincerity, how vehemently would her conscience have declared against the outrage! Natures such as hers are as little to be judged by that which is conventionally the highest standard as by that which is the lowest. The tendencies which we agree to call good and bad became

in her merely directions of a native force which was at all times in revolt against circumstance. Characters thus moulded may go far in achievement, but can never pass beyond the bounds of suffering. Never is the world their friend, nor the world's law. As often as our conventions give us the opportunity, we crush them out of being ; they are noxious ; they threaten the frame of society. Oftenest the crushing is done in such a way that the hapless creatures seem to have brought about their own destruction. Let us congratulate ourselves ; in one way or other it is assured that they shall not trouble us long.

Her father was somewhat later than usual in returning from work. When he entered her room she looked at him anxiously, and as he seemed to have nothing particular to say, she asked if he had seen Mr. Kirkwood.

"No, my dear, I ain't seen him."

Their eyes met for an instant. Clara was in anguish at the thought that another night and day must pass and nothing be altered.

"When did you see him last ? A week or more ago, wasn't it ?"

"About that."

“ Couldn’t you go round to his lodgings to-night? I know he’s got something he wants to speak to you about.”

He assented. But on his going into the other room Eagles met him with a message from Sidney, anticipating his design, and requesting him to step over to Red Lion Street in the course of the evening. John instantly announced this to his daughter. She nodded, but said nothing.

In a few minutes John went on his way. The day’s work had tired him exceptionally, doubtless owing to his nervousness, and again on the way to Sidney’s he had recourse to a dose of the familiar stimulant. With our eyes on a man of Hewett’s station we note these little things; we set them down as a point scored against him; yet if our business were with a man of leisure, who, owing to worry, found his glass of wine at luncheon and again at dinner an acceptable support, we certainly should not think of paying attention to the matter. Poverty makes a crime of every indulgence. John himself came out of the public-house in a slinking way, and hoped Kirkwood might not scent the twopenny-worth of gin.

Sidney was in anything but a mood to detect this little lapse in his visitor. He gave John a chair, but could not sit still himself. The garret was a spacious one, and whilst talking he moved from wall to wall.

"You know that I saw Clara last night? She told me she should mention it to you."

"Yes, yes. I was afraid she'd never have made up her mind to it. It was the best way for you to see her alone first, poor girl! You won't mind comin' to us now, like you used?"

"Did she tell you what she wished to speak to me about?"

"Why, no, she hasn't. Was there—anything particular?"

"She feels the time very heavy on her hands. It seems you don't like the thought of her looking for employment?"

John rose from his chair and grasped the back of it.

"You ain't a-goin' to encourage her to leave us? It ain't that you was talkin' about, Sidney?"

"Leave you? Why, where should she go?"

"No, no; it's all right; so long as you wasn't thinkin' of her goin' away again. See,

Sidney, I ain't got nothing to say against it, if she can find some kind of job for home. I know as the time must hang heavy. 'There she sit, poor thing! from mornin' to night, an' can't get her thoughts away from herself. It's easy enough to understand, ain't it? I took a book home for her the other day, but she didn't seem to care about it. 'There she sit, with her poor face on her hands, thinkin' and thinkin'. It breaks my heart to see her. I'd rather she had some work, but she mustn't go away from home for it."

Sidney took a few steps in silence.

"You don't misunderstand me," resumed the other, with suddenness. "You don't think as I won't trust her away from me. If she went, it 'ud be because she thinks herself a burden,—as if I wouldn't gladly live on a crust for my day's food an' spare her goin' among strangers! You can think yourself what it 'ud be to her, Sidney. No, no, it mustn't be nothing o' that kind. But I can't bear to see her livin' as she does; it's no life at all. I sit with her when I get back home at night, an' I'm glad to say she seems to find it a pleasure to have me by her; but it's the only bit o'

pleasure she gets, an' there's all the hours whilst I'm away. You see she don't take much to Mrs. Eagles ; that ain't her sort of friend. Not as she's got any pride left about her, poor girl ! don't think that. I tell you, Sidney, she's a dear good girl to her old father. If I could only see her a bit happier, I'd never grumble again as long as I lived, I wouldn't !”

Is there such a thing in this world as speech that has but one simple interpretation, one for him who utters it and for him who hears ? Honester words were never spoken than these in which Hewett strove to represent Clara in a favourable light, and to show the pitifulness of her situation ; yet he himself was conscious that they implied a second meaning, and Sidney was driven restlessly about the room by his perception of the same lurking motive in their pathos. John felt half-ashamed of himself when he ceased ; it was a new thing for him to be practising subtleties with a view to his own ends. But had he said a word more than the truth ?

I suppose it was the association of contrast that turned Sidney's thoughts to Joseph Snowdon. At all events it was of him he was

thinking in the silence that followed. Which silence having been broken by a tap at the door, oddly enough there stood Joseph himself. Hewett, taken by surprise, showed embarrassment and awkwardness; it was always hard for him to reconcile his present subordination to Mr. Snowdon with the familiar terms on which they had been not long ago.

“Ah, you here, Hewett!” exclaimed Joseph, in a genial tone, designed to put the other at his ease. “I just wanted a word with our friend. Never mind; some other time.”

For all that, he did not seem disposed to withdraw, but stood with a hand on the door, smiling. Sidney, having nodded to him, walked the length of the room, his head bent and his hands behind him.

“Suppose I look in a bit later,” said Hewett. “Or to-morrow night, Sidney?”

“Very well, to-morrow night.”

John took his leave, and on the visitor who remained Sidney turned a face almost of anger. Mr. Snowdon seated himself, supremely indifferent to the inconvenience he had probably caused. He seemed in excellent humour.

“Decent fellow, Hewett,” he observed, put-

ting up one leg against the fireplace. "Very decent fellow. He's getting old, unfortunately. Had a good deal of trouble, I understand; it breaks a man up."

Sidney scowled, and said nothing.

"I thought I'd stay, as I *was* here," continued Joseph, unbuttoning his respectable overcoat and throwing it open. "There was something rather particular I had in mind. Won't you sit down?"

"No, thank you."

Joseph glanced at him, and smiled all the more.

"I've had a little talk with the old man about Jane. By the bye, I'm sorry to say he's very shaky; doesn't look himself at all. I didn't know you had spoken to him quite so—you know what I mean. It seems to be his idea that everything's at an end between you."

"Perhaps so."

"Well, now, look here. You won't mind me just——. Doy ou think it was wise to put it in that way to him? I'm afraid you're making him feel just a little uncertain about you. I'm speaking as a friend, you know. In your own interest, Kirkwood. Old men get queer ideas

into their heads. You know, he *might* begin to think that you had some sort of—eh?”

It was not the second, nor yet the third, time that Joseph had looked in and begun to speak in this scrappy way, continuing the tone of that dialogue in which he had assumed a sort of community of interest between Kirkwood and himself. But the limit of Sidney's endurance was reached.

“There's no knowing,” he exclaimed, “what any one may think of me, if people who have their own ends to serve go spreading calumnies. Let us understand each other, and have done with it. I told Mr. Snowdon that I could never be anything but a friend to Jane. I said it, and I meant it. If you've any doubt remaining, in a few days I hope it'll be removed. What your real wishes may be I don't know, and I shall never after this have any need to know. I can't help speaking in this way, and I want to tell you once for all that there shall never again be a word about Jane between us. Wait a day or two, and you'll know the reason.”

Joseph affected an air of gravity—of offended dignity.

“That’s rather a queer sort of way to back out of your engagements, Kirkwood. I won’t say anything about myself, but with regard to my daughter”——

“What do you mean by speaking like that?” cried the young man, sternly. “You know very well that it’s what you wish most of all, to put an end to everything between your daughter and me! You’ve succeeded; be satisfied. If you’ve anything to say to me on any other subject, say it. If not, please let’s have done for the present. I don’t feel in a mood for beating about the bush any longer.”

“You’ve misunderstood me altogether, Kirkwood,” said Joseph, unable to conceal a twinkle of satisfaction in his eyes.

“No; I’ve understood you perfectly well,—too well. I don’t want to hear another word on the subject, and I won’t. It’s over; understand that.”

“Well, well; you’re a bit out of sorts. I’ll say good-bye for the present.”

He retired, and for a long time Sidney sat in black brooding.

John Hewett did not fail to present him-

self next evening. As he entered the room he was somewhat surprised at the cheerful aspect with which Sidney met him ; the grasp which his hand received seemed to have a significance. Sidney, after looking at him steadily, asked if he had not been home.

“ Yes, I’ve been home. Why do you want to know ? ”

“ Hadn’t Clara anything to tell you ? ”

“ No. What is it ? ”

“ Did she know you were coming here ? ”

“ Why, yes ; I mentioned it.”

Sidney again regarded him fixedly, with a smile.

“ I suppose she preferred that I should tell you. I looked in at the Buildings this afternoon, and had a talk with Clara.”

John hung upon his words, with lips slightly parted, with a trembling in the hairs of his grey beard.

“ You did ? ”

“ I had something to ask her, so I went when she was likely to be alone. It’s a long while ago since I asked her the question for the first time,—but I’ve got the right answer at last.”

John stared at him in pathetic agitation.

“You mean to tell me you’ve asked Clara to marry you?”

“There’s nothing very dreadful in that, I should think.”

“Give us your hand again! Sidney Kirkwood, give us your hand again! If there’s a good-hearted man in this world, if there’s a faithful, honest man, as only lives to do kindness——. What am I to say to you? It’s too much for me. I can’t find a word as I’d wish to speak. Stand out and let’s look at you. You make me as I can’t neither speak nor see, —I’m just like a child”——

He broke down utterly, and shook with the choking struggle of laughter and sobs. His emotion affected Sidney, who looked pale and troubled in spite of the smile still clinging feebly about his lips.

“If it makes you glad to hear it,” said the young man, in an uncertain voice, “I’m all the more glad myself, on that account.”

“Makes me glad? That’s no word for it, boy; that’s no word for it! Give us your hand again. I feel as if I’d ought to go down on my old knees and crave your pardon. If

only she could have lived to see this, the poor woman as died when things was at their worst! If I'd only listened to her there'd never have been them years of unfriendliness between us. You've gone on with one kindness after another, but this is more than I could ever a' thought possible. Why, I took it for certain as you was goin' to marry that other young girl; they told me as it was all settled."

"A mistake."

"I'd never have dared to hope it, Sidney. The one thing as I wished more than anything else on earth, and I couldn't think ever to see it. Glad's no word for what I feel. And to think as my girl kep' it from me! Yes, yes; there was something on her face; I remember it now. 'I'm just goin' round to have a word with Sidney,' I says. 'Are you, father?' she says. 'Don't stay too long.' And she had a sort o' smile I couldn't quite understand. She'll be a good wife to you, Sidney. Her heart's softened to all as she used to care for. She'll be a good and faithful wife to you as long as she lives. But I must go back home and speak to her. There ain't a man

livin', let him be as rich as he may, that feels such happiness as you've given me to-night."

He went stumbling down the stairs, and walked homewards at a great speed, so that when he reached the Buildings he had to wipe his face and stand for a moment before beginning the ascent. The children were at their home lessons; he astonished them by flinging his hat mirthfully on to the table.

"Now then, father!" cried young Tom, the eight-year-old, whose pen was knocked out of his hand.

With a chuckle John advanced to Clara's room. As he closed the door behind him she rose. His face was mottled; there were tear-stains about his eyes, and he had a wild, breathless look.

"An' you never told me! You let me go without half a word!"

Clara put her hands upon his shoulders and kissed him. "I didn't quite know whether it was true or not, father."

"My darling! My dear girl! Come an' sit on my knee, like you used to when you was a little 'un. I'm a rough old father for such as you, but nobody'll never love you

better than I do, an' always have done. So he's been faithful to you, for all they said. There ain't a better man livin'! 'It's a long time since I first asked the question,' he says, 'but she's give me the right answer at last.' And he looks that glad of it."

"He does? You're sure he does?"

"Sure? Why, you should a' seen him when I went into the room! There's nothing more as I wish for now. I only hope I may live a while longer, to see you forget all your troubles, my dear. He'll make you happy, will Sidney; he's got a deal more education than any one else I ever knew, and you'll suit each other. But you won't forget all about your old father? You'll let me come an' have a talk with you now and then, my dear, just you an' me together, you know?"

"I shall love you and be grateful to you always, father. You've kept a warm heart for me all this time."

"I couldn't do nothing else, Clara; you've always been what I loved most, and you always will be."

"If I hadn't had you to come back to, what would have become of me?"

“We’ll never think of that. We’ll never speak another word of that.”

“Father—— Oh, if I had my face again ! If I had my own face !”

A great anguish shook her ; she lay in his arms and sobbed. It was the farewell, even in her fulness of heart and deep sense of consolation, to all she had most vehemently desired. Gratitude and self-pity being indivisible in her emotions, she knew not herself whether the ache of regret or the soothing restfulness of deliverance made her tears flow. But at least there was no conscious duplicity, and for the moment no doubt that she had found her haven. It is a virtuous world, and our frequent condemnations are invariably based on justice ; will it be greatly harmful if for once we temper our righteous judgment with ever so little mercy ?

CHAPTER VI.

A FALL FROM THE IDEAL.

JOSEPH SNOWDON waxed daily in respectability. He was, for one thing, clothing himself in flesh, and, though still anything but a portly man, bore himself as becomes one who can indulge a taste for eating and drinking; his step was more deliberate, he no longer presented the suppleness of limb that so often accompanies a needy condition in the man of wits, he grew attentive to his personal equipment, he was always well combed and well shaven, and generally, in hours of leisure, you perceived a fragrance breathing from his handkerchief. Nor was this refinement addressed only to the public. To Clem he behaved with a correctness which kept that lady in a state of acute suspicion; not seldom he brought her a trifling gift, which he would offer with compliments, and he made a point of consulting her

pleasure or convenience in all matters that affected them in common. A similar dignity of bearing marked his relations with Hanover Street. When he entered Jane's parlour it was with a beautiful blending of familiarity and courtesy; he took his daughter's hand with an air of graceful affection, retaining it for a moment between his own, and regarding her with a gentle smile which hinted the pride of a parent. In speaking with the old man he habitually subdued his voice, respectfully bending forward, solicitously watching the opportunity of a service. Michael had pleasure in his company and conversation. Without overdoing it, Joseph accustomed himself to speak of philanthropic interests. He propounded a scheme for supplying the poor with a certain excellent filter at a price all but nominal; who did not know the benefit to humble homes of pure water for use as a beverage? The filter was not made yet, but Lake, Snowdon, & Co. had it under their consideration.

Michael kept his room a good deal in these wretched days of winter, so that Joseph had no difficulty in obtaining private interviews with his daughter. Every such occasion he

used assiduously, his great end being to possess himself of Jane's confidence. He did not succeed quite so well with the girl as with her grandfather ; there was always a reserve in her behaviour which as yet he found it impossible to overcome. Observation led him to conclude that much of this arose from the view she took of his relations with Sidney Kirkwood. Jane was in love with Sidney ; on that point he could have no doubt ; and in all likelihood she regarded him as unfriendly to Sidney's suit,—women are so shrewd in these affairs. Accordingly, Joseph made it his business by artful degrees to remove this prepossession from her mind. In the course of this endeavour he naturally pressed into his service the gradually discovered fact that Sidney had scruples of conscience regarding Jane's fortune. Marvellous as it appeared to him, he had all but come to the conclusion that this *was* a fact. Now, given Jane's character, which he believed he had sounded ; given her love for Kirkwood, which was obviously causing her anxiety and unhappiness ; Joseph saw his way to an admirable piece of strategy. What could be easier, if he played his cards well and patiently enough,

than to lead Jane to regard the fortune as her most threatening enemy? Valuable results might come of that, whether before or after the death of the old man.

The conversation in which he first ventured to strike this note undisguisedly took place on the same evening as that unpleasant scene when Sidney as good as quarrelled with him, —the evening before the day on which Sidney asked Clara Hewett to be his wife. Having found Jane alone, he began to talk in his most paternal manner, his chair very near hers, his eyes fixed on her sewing. And presently, when the ground was prepared :

“Jane, there’s something I’ve been wanting to say to you for a long time. My dear, I’m uneasy about you.”

“Uneasy, father?” and she glanced at him nervously.

“Yes, I’m uneasy. But whether I ought to tell you why, I’m sure I don’t know. You’re my own child, Janey, and you become dearer to me every day; but—it’s hard to say it—there naturally isn’t all the confidence between us that there might have been if—well, well, I won’t speak of that.”

“But won’t you tell me what makes you anxious?”

He laid the tips of his fingers on her head.
“Janey, shall you be offended if I speak about Mr. Kirkwood?”

“No, father.”

She tried in vain to continue sewing.

“My dear,—I believe there’s no actual engagement between you?”

“Oh no, father,” she replied, faintly.

“And yet—don’t be angry with me, my child—I think you are something more than friends?”

She made no answer.

“And I can’t help thinking, Janey,—I think about you very often indeed,—that Mr. Kirkwood has rather exaggerated views about the necessity of—of altering things between you.”

Quite recently Joseph had become aware of the understanding between Michael and Kirkwood. The old man still hesitated to break the news to Jane, saying to himself that it was better for Sidney to prepare her by the change in his behaviour.

“Of altering things?” Jane repeated, under her breath.

"It seems to me wrong—wrong to both of you," Joseph pursued, in a pathetic voice. "I can't help noticing my child's looks. I know she isn't what she used to be, poor little girl! And I know Kirkwood isn't what he used to be. It's very hard, and I feel for you—for both of you."

Jane sat motionless, not daring to lift her eyes, scarcely daring to breathe.

"Janey."

"Yes, father."

"I wonder whether I'm doing wrong to your grandfather in speaking to you confidentially like this? I can't believe he notices things as I do; he'd never wish you to be unhappy."

"But I don't quite understand, father. What do you mean about Mr. Kirkwood? Why should he"——

The impulse failed her. A fear which she had harboured for many weary days was being confirmed, and she could not ask directly for the word that would kill hope.

"Have I a right to tell you? I thought perhaps you understood."

"As you have gone so far, I think you must explain. I don't see how you can be doing wrong."

“Poor Kirkwood! You see, he’s in such a delicate position, my dear. I think myself that he’s acting rather strangely, after everything; but it’s—it’s your money, Jane. He doesn’t think he ought to ask you to marry him, under the circumstances.”

She trembled.

“Now who should stand by you, in a case like this, if not your own father? Of course he can’t say a word to you himself; and of course you can’t say a word to him; and altogether it’s a pitiful business.”

Jane shrank from discussing such a topic with her father. Her next words were uttered with difficulty.

“But the money isn’t my own—it’ll never be my own. He—Mr. Kirkwood knows that.”

“He does, to be sure. But it makes no difference. He has told your grandfather, my love, that—that the responsibility would be too great. He has told him distinctly that everything’s at an end—everything that *might* have happened.”

She just looked at him, then dropped her eyes on her sewing.

“Now, as your father, Janey, I know it’s

right that you should be told of this. I feel you're being very cruelly treated, my child. And I wish to goodness I could only see any way out of it for you both. Of course I'm powerless either for acting or speaking; you can understand that. But I want you to think of me as your truest friend, my love."

More still he said, but Jane had no ears for it. When he left her, she bade him good-bye mechanically, and stood on the same spot by the door, without thought, stunned by what she had learnt.

That Sidney would be impelled to such a decision as this she had never imagined. His reserve whilst yet she was in ignorance of her true position she could understand; also his delaying for a while even after everything had been explained to her. But that he should draw away from her altogether seemed inexplicable, for it implied a change in him which nothing had prepared her to think possible. Unaltered in his love, he refused to share the task of her life, to aid in the work which he regarded with such fervent sympathy. Her mind was not subtle enough to conceive those objections to Michael's idea

which had weighed with Sidney almost from the first, for though she had herself shrunk from the great undertaking, it was merely in weakness,—a reason she never dreamt of attributing to him. Nor had she caught as much as a glimpse of those base, scheming interests, contact with which had aroused Sidney's vehement disgust. Was her father to be trusted? This was the first question that shaped itself in her mind. He did not like Sidney; that she had felt all along, as well as the reciprocal coldness on Sidney's part. But did his unfriendliness go so far as to prompt him to intervene with untruths? "Of course you can't say a word to him"—that remark would bear an evil interpretation, which her tormented mind did not fail to suggest. Moreover, he had seemed so anxious that she should not broach the subject with her grandfather. But what constrained her to silence? If, indeed, he had nothing but her happiness at heart, he could not take it ill that she should seek to understand the whole truth, and Michael must tell her whether Sidney had indeed thus spoken to him.

Before she had obtained any show of control over her agitation Michael came into the room.

Evening was the old man's best time, and when he had kept his own chamber through the day he liked to come and sit with Jane as she had her supper.

"Didn't I hear your father's voice?" he asked, as he moved slowly to his accustomed chair.

"Yes. He couldn't stay."

Jane stood in an attitude of indecision. Having seated himself, Michael glanced at her. His regard had not its old directness; it seemed apprehensive, as if seeking to probe her thought.

"Has Miss Lant sent you the book she promised?"

"Yes, grandfather."

This was a recently published volume dealing with charitable enterprise in some part of London. Michael noticed with surprise the uninterested tone of Jane's reply. Again he looked at her, and more searchingly.

"Would you like to read me a little of it?"

She reached the book from a side-table, drew near, and stood turning the pages. The confusion of her mind was such that she could not have read a word with understanding. Then she spoke, involuntarily.

“Grandfather, has Mr. Kirkwood said anything more—about me?”

The words made painful discord in her ears, but instead of showing heightened colour she grew pallid. Holding the book partly open, she felt all her nerves and muscles strained as if in some physical effort; her feet were rooted to the spot.

“Have you heard anything from him?” returned the old man, resting his hands on the sides of the easy-chair.

“Father has been speaking about him. He says Mr. Kirkwood has told you something.”

“Yes. Come and sit down by me, Jane.”

She could not move nearer. Though unable to form a distinct conception, she felt a foreboding of what must come to pass. The dread failure of strength was more than threatening her; her heart was sinking, and by no effort of will could she summon the thoughts that should aid her against herself.

“What has your father told you?” Michael asked, when he perceived her distress. He spoke with a revival of energy, clearly, commandingly.

“He says that Mr. Kirkwood wishes you to

forget what he told you, and what you repeated to me."

"Did he give you any reason?"

"Yes. I don't understand, though."

"Come here by me, Jane. Let's talk about it quietly. Sidney doesn't feel able to help you as he thought he could. We mustn't blame him for that; he must judge for himself. He thinks it'll be better if you continue to be only friends."

Jane averted her face, his steady look being more than she could bear. For an instant a sense of uttermost shame thrilled through her, and without knowing what she did, she moved a little and laid the book down.

"Come here, my child," he repeated, in a gentler voice.

She approached him.

"You feel it hard. But when you've thought about it a little you won't grieve; I'm sure you won't. Remember, your life is not to be like that of ordinary women. You've higher objects before you, and you'll find a higher reward. You know that, don't you? There's no need for me to remind you of what we've talked about so often, is there? If it's

a sacrifice, you're strong enough to face it; yes, yes, strong enough to face more than this, my Jane is! Only fix your thoughts on the work you're going to do. It'll take up all your life, Jane, won't it? You'll have no time to give to such things as occupy other women, —no mind for them."

His grey eyes searched her countenance with that horrible intensity of fanaticism which is so like the look of cruelty, of greed, of any passion originating in the baser self. Unlike too, of course, but it is the pitilessness common to both extremes that shows most strongly in an old, wrinkled visage. He had laid his hand upon her. Every word was a stab in the girl's heart, and so dreadful became her torture, so intolerable the sense of being drawn by a fierce will away from all she desired, that at length a cry escaped her lips. She fell on her knees by him, and pleaded in a choking voice.

"I can't! Grandfather, don't ask it of me! Give it all to some one else—to some one else! I'm not strong enough to make such a sacrifice. Let me be as I was before!"

Michael's face darkened. He drew his hand away and rose from the seat; with more than

surprise, with anger and even bitterness, he looked down at the crouching girl. She did not sob ; her face buried in her arms, she lay against the chair, quivering, silent.

“Jane, stand up and speak to me !”

She did not move.

“Jane !”

He laid his hand on her. Jane raised her head, and endeavoured to obey him ; in the act she moaned and fell insensible.

Michael strode to the door and called twice or thrice for Mrs. Byass ; then he stooped by the lifeless girl and supported her head. Bessie was immediately at hand, with a cry of consternation, but also with helpful activity.

“Why, I thought she’d got over this ; it’s a long time since she was took last, isn’t it ? Sam’s downstairs, Mr. Snowdon ; do just shout out to him to go for some brandy. Tell him to bring my smelling-bottle first, if he knows where it is,—I’m blest if I do ! Poor thing ! She ain’t been at all well lately, and that’s the truth.”

The truth, beyond a doubt. Pale face, showing now the thinness which it had not wholly outgrown, the inheritance from miser-

able childhood ; no face of a stern heroine, counting as idle all the natural longings of the heart, consecrated to a lifelong combat with giant wrongs. Nothing better nor worse than the face of one who can love and must be loved in turn.

She came to herself, and at the same moment Michael went from the room.

“There now ; there now,” crooned Bessie, with much patting of the hands and stroking of the cheeks. “Why, what’s come to you, Jane ? Cry away ; don’t try to prevent yourself ; it’ll do you good to cry a bit. Of course, here comes Sam with all sorts of things, when there’s no need of him. He’s always either too soon or too late, is Sam. Just look at him, Jane ; now if *he* don’t make you laugh, nothing will !”

Mr. Byass retired, shamefaced. Leaning against Bessie’s shoulder, Jane sobbed for a long time, sobbed in the misery of shame. She saw that her grandfather had gone away. How should she ever face him after this ? It was precious comfort to feel Bessie’s sturdy arms about her, and to hear the foolish affectionate words, which asked nothing but that

she should take them kindly and have done with her trouble.

“Did grandfather tell you how it was?” she asked, with a sudden fear lest Bessie should have learnt her pitiful weakness.

“Why, no; how did it come?”

“I don’t know. We were talking. I can stand up now, Mrs. Byass, thank you. I’ll go up to my room. I’ve forgotten the time; is it late?”

It was only nine o’clock. Bessie would have gone upstairs with her, but Jane insisted that she was quite herself. On the stairs she trod as lightly as possible, and she closed her door without a sound. Alone, she again gave way to tears. Michael’s face was angry in her memory; he had never looked at her in that way before, and now he would never look with the old kindness. What a change had been wrought in these few minutes!

And Sidney never anything but her friend,—cold, meaningless word! If he knew how she had fallen, would that be likely to bring him nearer to her? She had lost both things, that was all.

CHAPTER VII.

THE DEBT REPAID.

SHE rose early, in the murky cold of the winter morning. When, at eight o'clock, she knocked as usual at her grandfather's door his answer made her tremble.

“I shall be down in a few minutes, Jane I'll have breakfast with you.”

It was long since he had risen at this hour. His voice sounded less like that of an old man, and, in spite of his calling her by her name, she felt the tone to be severe. When he reached the parlour he did not offer to take her hand, and she feared to approach him. She saw that his features bore the mark of sleeplessness. Hers, poor girl! were yet more woeful in their pallor.

Through the meal he affected to occupy himself with the book Miss Lant had sent,—

the sight of which was intolerable to Jane. And not for a full hour did he speak anything but casual words. Jane had taken her sewing; unexpectedly he addressed her.

“Let’s have a word or two together, Jane. I think we ought to, oughtn’t we?”

She forced herself to regard him.

“I think you meant what you said last night?”

“Grandfather, I will do whatever you bid me. I’ll do it faithfully. I was ungrateful. I feel ashamed to have spoken so.”

“That’s nothing to do with it, Jane. You’re not ungrateful; anything but that. But I’ve had a night to think over your words. You couldn’t speak like that if you weren’t driven to it by the strongest feeling you ever knew or will know. I hadn’t thought of it in that way; I hadn’t thought of you in that way.”

He began gently, but in the last words was a touch of reproof, almost of scorn. He gazed at her from under his grey eyebrows, perhaps hoping to elicit some resistance of her spirit, some sign of strength that would help him to reconstruct his shattered ideal.

“Grandfather, I’ll try with all my strength to be what you wish,—I will!”

“And suppose the strength isn’t sufficient, child?”

Even in her humility she could not but feel that this was unjust. Had she ever boasted? Had she ever done more than promise tremblingly what he demanded? But the fear was legitimate. A weak thing, all but heart-broken, could she hope to tread firmly in any difficult path? She hung her head, making no answer.

He examined her, seeming to measure the slightness of her frame. Sad, unutterably sad, was the deep breath he drew as he turned his eyes away again.

“Do you feel well this morning, Jane?”

“Yes, grandfather.”

“Have you slept?”

“I couldn’t. You were grieving about me. I hoped never to have disappointed you.”

He fell into reverie. Was he thinking of that poor wife of his, dead long, long ago, the well-meaning girl of whom he had expected impossible things? A second time had he thus erred, no longer with the excuse of in-

experience and hot blood. That cry of Jane's had made its way to his heart. An enthusiast, he was yet capable of seeing by the common light of day, when his affections were deeply stirred. And in the night he had pondered much over his son's behaviour. Was he being deceived in that quarter also, and there intentionally? Did Joseph know this child better than he had done, and calculate upon her weakness? The shock, instead of disabling him, had caused a revival of his strength. He could walk more firmly this morning than at any time since his accident. His brain was clear and active; he knew that it behoved him to reconsider all he had been doing, and that quickly, ere it was too late. He must even forget that aching of the heart until he had leisure to indulge it.

"You shan't disappoint me, my dear," he said gravely. "It's my own fault if I don't take your kindness as you mean it. I have to go out, Jane, but I shall be back to dinner. Perhaps we'll talk again afterwards."

Of late, on the rare occasions of his leaving the house, he had always told her where he was going, and for what purpose; Jane under-

stood that this confidence was at an end. When he was gone she found occupation for a short time, but presently could only sit over the fire, nursing her many griefs. She was no longer deemed worthy of confidence ; worse than that, she had no more faith in herself. If Sidney learnt what had happened he could not even retain his respect for her. In this way she thought of it, judging Kirkwood by the ideal standard, which fortunately is so unlike human nature ; taking it for granted—so oppressed was her mind by the habit of dwelling on artificial motives—that he only liked her because he had believed her strong in purpose, forgetting altogether that his love had grown before he was aware that anything unusual was required of her. She did remember, indeed, that it was only the depth of her love for him which had caused her disgrace ; but, even if he came to understand that, it would not, she feared, weigh in her favour against his judgment.

It was the natural result of the influences to which she had been subjected. Her mind, overwrought by resolute contemplation of ideas beyond its scope, her gentle nature bent

beneath a burden of duty to which it was unequal, and taught to consider with painful solemnity those impulses of kindness which would otherwise have been merely the simple joys of life, she had come to distrust every instinct which did not subserve the supreme purpose. Even of Sidney's conduct she could not reason in a natural way. Instinct would have bidden her reproach him, though ever so gently; was it well done to draw away when he must have known how she looked for his aid? Her artificial self urged, on the other hand, that he had not acted thus without some gravely considered motive. What it was she could not pretend to divine; her faith in his nobleness overcame every perplexity. Of the persons constituting this little group and playing their several parts, she alone had fallen altogether below what was expected of her. As humble now as in the days of her serfdom, Jane was incapable of revolting against the tyranny of circumstances. Life had grown very hard for her again, but she believed that this was to a great extent her own fault, the outcome of her own unworthy weakness.

At Michael's return she did her best to betray no idle despondency. Their midday meal was almost as silent as breakfast had been; his eyes avoided her, and frequently he lost himself in thought. As he was rising from the table Jane observed an unsteadiness in his movement; he shook his head mechanically and leaned forward on both his hands, as if feeling giddy. She approached him, but did not venture to speak.

"I'll go upstairs," he said, having sighed slightly.

"May I come and read to you, grandfather?"

"Not just now, Jane. Go out whilst it's a bit fine."

He went from the room, still with an unsteady walk. Reaching his own room, where there was a cheerful fire, he sat down, and remained for a long time unoccupied, save with his reflections. This chamber had scarcely changed in a detail of its arrangement since he first came to inhabit it. There was the chair which Sidney always used, and that on which Jane had sat since she was the silent, frail child of thirteen. Here had his vision taken form, growing more definite with the growth of his

granddaughter, seeming to become at length a splendid reality. What talk had been held here between Kirkwood and himself whilst Jane listened ! All gone into silence ; gone, too, the hope it had encouraged.

He was weary after the morning's absence from home, and fell into a light slumber. Dreams troubled him. First he found himself in Australia ; he heard again the sudden news of his son's death ; the shock awoke him. Another dozing fit, and he was a young man with a wife and children to support ; haunted with the fear of coming to want ; harsh, unreasonable in his exactions at home. Something like a large black coffin came into his dream, and in dread of it he again returned to consciousness.

All night he had been thinking of the dark story of long ago,—his wife's form motionless on the bed,—the bottle which told him what had happened. Why must that memory revive to trouble his last days ? Part of his zeal for the great project had come of a feeling that he might thus in some degree repair his former ill-doing ; Jane would be a providence to many hapless women whose burden was as heavy as

his own wife's had been. Must he abandon that solace? In any case he could bestow his money for charitable purposes, but it would not be the same, it would not effect what he had aimed at.

Late in the afternoon he drew from the inner pocket of his coat a long envelope and took thence a folded paper. It was covered with clerkly writing, which he perused several times. At length he tore the paper slowly across the middle, again tore the fragments, and threw them on to the fire. . . .

Jane obeyed her grandfather's word and went out for an hour. She wished for news of Pennyloaf, who had been ill, and was now very near the time of her confinement. At the door of the house in Merlin Place she was surprised to encounter Bob Hewett, who stood in a lounging attitude; he had never appeared to her so disreputable,—not that his clothes were worse than usual, but his face and hands were dirty, and the former was set in a hang-dog look.

"Is your wife upstairs, Mr. Hewett?" Jane asked, when he had nodded sullenly in reply to her greeting.

“Yes ; and somebody else too as could have been dispensed with. There’s another mouth to feed.”

“No, there ain’t,” cried a woman’s voice just behind him.

Jane recognised the speaker, a Mrs. Griffin, who lived in the house and was neighbourly to Pennyloaf.

“There ain’t ?” inquired Bob, gruffly.

“The child’s dead.”

“Thank goodness for that, any way !”

Mrs. Griffin explained to Jane that the birth had taken place twelve hours ago. Pennyloaf was “very low,” but not in a state to cause anxiety ; perhaps it would be better for Jane to wait until to-morrow before seeing her.

“She didn’t say ‘thank goodness,’” added the woman, with a scornful glance at Bob, “but I don’t think she’s over sorry as it’s gone, an’ small blame to her. There’s some people as doesn’t care much what sort o’ times she has,—not meanin’ *you*, Miss, but them as had *ought* to care.”

Bob looked more disreputable than ever. His eyes were fixed on Jane, and with such a singular expression that the latter, meeting

their gaze, felt startled, she did not know why. At the same moment he stepped down from the threshold and walked away without speaking.

"I shouldn't care to have *him* for a 'usband," pursued Mrs. Griffin. "Of course he must go an' lose his work, just when his wife's wantin' a few little extries, as you may say."

"Lost his work?"

"Day 'fore yes'day. I don't like him, an' I don't like his ways; he'll be gettin' into trouble before long, you mind what I say. His family's a queer lot, 'cordin' to what they tell. Do you know them, Miss?"

"I used to, a long time ago."

"You knew his sister—her as is come 'ome?"

"His sister?"

"Her as was a actress. Mrs. Bannister was tellin' me only last night; she had it from Mrs. Horrocks, as heard from a friend of hers as lives in the Farrin'don Buildin's, where the Hewetts lives too. They tell me it was in the Sunday paper, though I don't remember nothing about it at the time. It seems as how a woman threw vitrol over her an' burnt her face so as there's no knowin' her, an' she goes about with a veil, an' 'cause she can't get her

own livin' no more, of course she's come back 'ome, for all she ran away an' disgraced herself shameful."

Jane gazed fixedly at the speaker, scarcely able to gather the sense of what was said.

"Miss Hewett, you mean? Mr. Hewett's eldest daughter?"

"So I understand."

"She has come home? When?"

"I can't just say; but a few weeks ago, I believe. They say it's nearly two months since it was in the paper."

"Does Mrs. Hewett know about it?"

"I can't say. She's never spoke to me as if she did. And, as I tell you, I only heard yes'day myself. If you're a friend of theirs, p'r'aps I hadn't oughtn't to a' mentioned it. It just come to my lips in the way o' talkin'. Of course I don't know nothin' about the young woman myself; it's only what you comes to 'ear in the way o' talkin', you know."

This apology was doubtless produced by the listener's troubled countenance. Jane asked no further question, but said she would come to see Pennyloaf on the morrow, and so took her leave.

At ten o'clock next morning, just when Jane was preparing for her visit to Merlin Place, so possessed with anxiety to ascertain if Penny-loaf knew anything about Clara Hewett that all her troubles were for the moment in the background, Bessie Byass came running upstairs with a strange announcement. Sidney Kirkwood had called, and wished to see Miss Snowdon in private for a few minutes.

"Something must have happened," said Jane, her heart standing still.

Bessie had a significant smile, but suppressed it when she noticed the agitation into which her friend was fallen.

"Shall I ask him up into the front room?"

Michael was in his own chamber, which he had not left this morning. On going to the parlour Jane found her visitor standing in expectancy. Yes, something had happened; it needed but to look at him to be convinced of that. And before a word was spoken Jane knew that his coming had reference to Clara Hewett, knew it with the strangest certainty.

"I didn't go to work this morning," Sidney began, "because I was very anxious to see

you—alone. I have something to speak about—to tell you.”

“Let us sit down.”

Sidney waited till he met her look ; she regarded him without self-consciousness, without any effort to conceal her agitated interest.

“You see young Hewett and his wife sometimes. Have you heard from either of them that Clara Hewett is living with her father again ?”

“Not from them. A person in their house spoke about it yesterday. It was the first I had heard.”

“Spoke of Miss Hewett ? In a gossiping way, do you mean ?”

“Yes.”

“Then you know what has happened to her ?”

“If the woman told the truth.”

There was silence.

“Miss Snowdon”——

“Oh, I don’t like you to speak so. You used to call me Jane.”

He looked at her in distress. She had spoken impulsively, but not with the kind of emotion the words seem to imply. It was for his

sake, not for hers, that she broke that formal speech.

“You called me so when I was a child, Mr. Kirkwood,” she continued, smiling for all she was so pale. “It sounds as if something had altered. You’re my oldest friend, and won’t you always be so? Whatever you’re going to tell me, surely it doesn’t prevent us from being friends, just the same as always?”

He had not seen her in her weakness, the night before last. As little as he could imagine that, was he able to estimate the strength with which she now redeemed her womanly dignity. His face told her what he had to disclose. No question now of proving herself superior to common feelings; it was Sidney who made appeal to her, and her heart went forth to grant him all he desired.

“Jane,—dear, good Jane,—you remember what I said to you in the garden at Danbury,—that I had forgotten her. I thought it was true. But you know what a terrible thing has befallen her. I should be less than a man if I could say that she is nothing to me.”

“Have you spoken to her?”

“I have asked her to be my wife. Jane, if

I had come to you yesterday, before going to her, and had told you what I meant to do, and explained all I felt, how the love of years ago had grown in me again, wouldn't you have given me a friendly hand?"

"Just like I do now. Do you think I have forgotten one night when she stood by me and saved me from cruel treatment, and then nursed me when I fell ill?"

Neither of them had the habit of making long speeches. They understood each other, —very nearly; sufficiently, at all events, to make the bond of sympathy between them stronger than ever. Jane was misled a little, for she thought that here was the explanation of Sidney's withdrawing his word to her grandfather; doubtless he heard of the calamity when it happened. But on a more essential point she fell into no misconception. Did Sidney desire that she should?

He held her hand until she gently drew it away.

"You will go up and tell grandfather," she said, gravely; then added, before he could speak, "But I'll just see him first for a minute. He hasn't been out of his room this morning yet. Please wait here."

She left him, and Sidney fell back on his chair, weebegone, distracted.

Michael, brooding sorrowfully, at first paid no heed to Jane when she entered his room. It was not long since he had risen, and his simple breakfast, scarcely touched, was still on the table.

“Grandfather, Mr. Kirkwood is here, and wishes to speak to you.”

He collected himself, and, regarding her, became aware that she was strongly moved.

“Wishes to see me, Jane? Then I suppose he came to see you first?”

Prepared now for anything unexpected, feeling that the links between himself and these young people were artificial, and that he could but watch, as if from a distance, the course of their lives, his first supposition was, that Sidney had again altered his mind. He spoke coldly, and had little inclination for the interview.

“Yes,” Jane replied, “he came to see me, but only to tell me that he is going to be married.”

His wrinkled face slowly gathered an expression of surprise.

“He will tell you who it is; he will explain.

But I wanted to speak to you first. Grandfather, I was afraid you might say something about me. Will you—will you forget my foolishness? Will you think of me as you did before? When he has spoken to you, you will understand why I am content to put everything out of my mind, everything you and I talked of. But I couldn't bear for him to know how I have disappointed you. Will you let me be all I was to you before? Will you trust me again, grandfather? You haven't spoken to him yet about me, have you?"

Michael shook his head.

"Then you will let it be as if nothing had happened? Grandfather"——

She bent beside him and took his hand. Michael looked at her with a light once more in his eyes.

"Tell him to come. He shall hear nothing from me, Jane."

"And you will try to forget it?"

"I wish nothing better. Tell him to come here, my child. When he's gone we'll talk together again."

The interview did not last long, and Sidney

left the house without seeing Jane a second time.

She would have promised anything now. Seeing that life had but one path of happiness for her, the path hopelessly closed, what did it matter by which of the innumerable other ways she accomplished her sad journey? For an instant, whilst Sidney was still speaking, she caught a gleam of hope in renunciation itself, the kind of strength which idealism is fond of attributing to noble natures. A gleam only, and deceptive; she knew it too well after the day spent by her grandfather's side, encouraging, at the expense of her heart's blood, all his revived faith in her. But she would not again give way. The old man should reap fruit of her gratitude, and Sidney should never suspect how nearly she had proved herself unworthy of his high opinion.

She had dreamed her dream, and on awaking must be content to take up the day's duties. Just in the same way, when she was a child at Mrs. Peckover's, did not sleep often bring a vision of happiness, of freedom from bitter tasks, and had she not to wake in the miser-

able mornings, trembling lest she had lain too long? Her condition was greatly better than then, so much better that it seemed wicked folly to lament because one joy was not granted her.—Why, in the meantime she had forgotten all about Pennyloaf. That visit must be paid the first thing this morning.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE TREASURY UNLOCKED.

A SUNDAY morning. In their parlour in Burton Crescent, Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Snowdon were breakfasting. The sound of church bells—most depressing of all sounds that mingle in the voice of London—intimated that it was nearly eleven o'clock, but neither of our friends had in view the attendance of public worship. Blended odours of bacon and kippered herrings filled the room—indeed, the house, for several breakfasts were in progress under the same roof. For a wonder, the morning was fine, even sunny ; a yellow patch glimmered on the worn carpet, and the grime of the window-panes was visible against an unfamiliar sky. Joseph, incompletely dressed, had a Sunday paper propped before him, and read whilst he ate. Clem, also in anything but *grande toilette*, was using a knife for the purpose of

conveying to her mouth the juice which had exuded from crisp rashers. As usual, they had very little to say to each other. Clem looked at her husband now and then, from under her eyebrows, surreptitiously.

After one of these glances she said, in a tone which was not exactly hostile, but had a note of suspicion :

“I’d give something to know why he’s going to marry Clara Hewett.”

“Not the first time you’ve made that remark,” returned Joseph, without looking up from his paper.

“I suppose I can speak?”

“Oh yes. But I’d try to do so in a more lady-like way.”

Clem flashed at him a gleam of hatred. He had become fond lately of drawing attention to her defects of breeding. Clem certainly did not keep up with his own progress in the matter of external refinement; his comments had given her a sense of inferiority, which irritated her solely as meaning that she was not his equal in craft. She let a minute or two pass, then returned to the subject.

“There’s something at the bottom of it; I

know that. Of course you know more about it than you pretend."

Joseph leaned back in his chair and regarded her with a smile of the loftiest scorn.

"It never occurs to you to explain it in the simplest way, of course. If ever you hear of a marriage, the first thing you ask yourself is: What has he or she to gain by it? Natural enough—in you. Now do you really suppose that all marriages come about in the way that *yours* did—on your side, I mean?"

Clem was far too dull-witted to be capable of quick retort. She merely replied:

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"Of course not. But let me assure you that people sometimes think of other things besides making profit when they get married. It's a pity that you always show yourself so coarse-minded."

Joseph was quite serious in administering this rebuke. He really felt himself justified in holding the tone of moral superiority. The same phenomenon has often been remarked in persons conscious that their affairs are prospering, and whose temptations to paltry meanness are on that account less frequent.

“And what about yourself?” asked his wife, having found her retort at length. “Why did you want to marry *me*, I’d like to know?”

“Why? You are getting too modest. How could I live in the same house with such a good-looking and sweet-tempered and well-behaved”——

“Oh, shut up!” she exclaimed, in a voice such as one hears at the street-corner. “It was just because you thought we was goin’ to be fools enough to keep you in idleness. Who was the fool, after all?”

Joseph smiled, and returned to his newspaper. In satisfaction at having reduced him to silence, Clem laughed aloud and clattered with the knife on her plate. As she was doing so there came a knock at the door.

“A gentleman wants to know if you’re in, sir,” said the house-thrall, showing a smeary face. “Mr. Byass is the name.”

“Mr. Byass? I’ll go down and see him.”

Clem’s face became alive with suspicion. In spite of her careless attire she intercepted Joseph, and bade the servant ask Mr. Byass to come upstairs. “How can you go down without a collar?” she said to her husband.

He understood, and was somewhat uneasy, but made no resistance. Mr. Byass presented himself. He had a very long face, and obviously brought news of grave import. Joseph shook hands with him.

“You don’t know my wife, I think. Mr. Byass, Clem. Nothing wrong, I hope?”

Samuel, having made his best City bow, swung back from his toes to his heels, and stood looking down into his hat. “I’m sorry to say,” he began, with extreme gravity, “that Mr. Snowdon is rather ill—in fact, very ill. Miss Jane asked me to come as sharp as I could.”

“Ill? In what way?”

“I’m afraid it’s a stroke, or something in that line. He fell down without a word of warning, just before ten o’clock. He’s lying insensible.”

“I’ll come at once,” said Joseph. “They’ve got a doctor, I hope?”

“Yes; the doctor had been summoned instantly.”

“I’ll go with you,” said Clem, in a tone of decision.

“No, no; what’s the good? You’ll only be in the way.”

“No, I shan’t. If he’s as bad as all that, I shall come.”

Both withdrew to prepare themselves. Mr. Byass, who was very nervous and perspiring freely, began to walk round and round the table, inspecting closely, in complete absence of mind, the objects that lay on it.

“We’ll have a cab,” cried Joseph, as he came forth equipped. “Poor Jane’s in a sad state, I’m afraid, eh?”

In a few minutes they were driving up Pentonville Road. Clem scarcely ever removed her eye from Joseph’s face; the latter held his lips close together and kept his brows wrinkled. Few words passed during the drive.

At the door of the house appeared Bessie, much agitated. All turned into the parlour on the ground floor and spoke together for a few minutes. Michael had been laid on his bed; at present Jane only was with him, but the doctor would return shortly.

“Will you tell her I’m here?” said Joseph to Mrs. Byass. “I’ll see her in the sitting-room.”

He went up and waited. Throughout the house prevailed that unnatural, nerve-distressing quietude which tells the presence of

calamity. The church bells had ceased ringing, and Sunday's silence in the street enhanced the effect of blankness and alarming expectancy. Joseph could not keep still; he strained his ears in attention to any slight sound that might come from the floor above, and his heart beat painfully when at length the door opened.

Jane fixed her eyes on him and came silently forward.

"Does he show any signs of coming round?" her father inquired.

"No. He hasn't once moved."

She spoke only just above a whisper. The shock kept her still trembling and her face bloodless.

"Tell me how it happened, Jane."

"He'd just got up. I'd taken him his breakfast, and we were talking. All at once he began to turn round, and then he fell down—before I could reach him."

"I'll go upstairs, shall I?"

Jane could not overcome her fear; at the door of the bedroom she drew back, involuntarily, that her father might enter before her. When she forced herself to follow, the first

glimpse of the motionless form shook her from head to foot. The thought of death was dreadful to her, and death seemed to lurk invisibly in this quiet room. The pale sunlight affected her as a mockery of hope.

"You won't go away again, father?" she whispered.

He shook his head.

In the meantime Bessie and Clem were conversing. On the single previous occasion of Clem's visit to the house they had not met. They examined each other's looks with curiosity. Clem wished it were possible to get at the secrets of which Mrs. Byass was doubtless in possession; Bessie on her side was reserved, circumspect.

"Will he get over it?" the former inquired, with native brutality.

"I'm sure I don't know; I hope he may."

The medical man arrived, and when he came downstairs again Joseph accompanied him. Clem, when she found that nothing definite could be learned, and that her husband had no intention of leaving, expressed her wish to walk round to Clerkenwell Close and see her mother. Joseph approved.

“You’d better have dinner there,” he said to her privately. “We can’t both of us come down on the Byasses.”

She nodded, and with a parting glance of hostile suspicion set forth. When she had crossed City Road, Clem’s foot was on her native soil; she bore herself with conscious importance, hoping to meet some acquaintance who would be impressed by her attire and demeanour. Nothing of the kind happened, however. It was the dead hour of Sunday morning, midway in service-time, and long before the opening of public-houses. In the neighbourhood of those places of refreshment were occasionally found small groups of men and boys, standing with their hands in their pockets, dispirited, seldom caring even to smoke; they kicked their heels against the kerbstone and sighed for one o’clock. Clem went by them with a haughty balance of her head.

As she entered by the open front door and began to descend the kitchen steps, familiar sounds were audible. Mrs. Peckover’s voice was raised in dispute with some one; it proved to be a quarrel with a female lodger respecting

the sum of threepence-farthing, alleged by the landlady to be owing on some account or other. The two women had already reached the point of calling each other liar and thief. Clem, having no acquaintance with the lodger, walked into the kitchen with an air of contemptuous indifference. The quarrel continued for another ten minutes,—if the head of either had been suddenly cut off it would assuredly have gone on railing for an appreciable time,—and Clem waited, sitting before the fire. At last the lodger had departed, and the last note of her virulence died away.

“And what do *you* want?” asked Mrs. Peckover, turning sharply upon her daughter.

“I suppose I can come to see you, can’t I?”

“Come to see me! Likely! When did you come last? You’re a ungrateful beast, that’s what you are!”

“All right. Go a’ead! Anything else you’d like to call me?”

Mrs. Peckover was hurt by the completeness with which Clem had established her independence. To do the woman justice, she had been actuated, in her design of capturing Joseph Snowdon, at least as much by a wish

to establish her daughter satisfactorily as by the ever-wakeful instinct which bade her seize whenever gain lay near her clutches. Clem was proving disloyal, had grown secretive. Mrs. Peckover did not look for any direct profit worth speaking of from the marriage she had brought about, but she did desire the joy of continuing to plot against Joseph with his wife. Moreover, she knew that Clem was a bungler, altogether lacking in astuteness, and her soul was pained by the thought of chances being missed. Her encounter with the lodger had wrought her up to the point at which she could discuss matters with Clem frankly. The two abused each other for a while, but Clem really desired to communicate her news, so that calmer dialogue presently ensued.

“Old Snowdon’s had a stroke, if you’d like to know, and it’s my belief he won’t get over it.”

“Your belief! And what’s your belief worth? Had a stroke, has he? Who told you?”

“I’ve just come from the ’ouse. Jo’s stoppin’ there.”

They discussed the situation in all its

aspects, but Mrs. Peckover gave it clearly to be understood that, from her point of view, "the game was spoilt." As long as Joseph continued living under her roof she could in a measure direct the course of events ; Clem had chosen to abet him in his desire for removal, and if ill came of it she had only herself to blame.

"I can look out for myself," said Clem.

"Can you ? I'm glad to hear it."

And Mrs. Peckover sniffed the air, scornfully. The affectionate pair dined together, each imbibing a pint and a half of "mild and bitter," and Clem returned to Hanover Street. From Joseph she could derive no information as to the state of the patient.

"If you will stay here, where you can do no good," he said, "sit down and keep quiet."

"Certainly I shall stay," said his wife, "because I know you want to get rid of me."

Joseph left her in the sitting-room, and went upstairs again to keep his daughter company. Jane would not leave the bedside. To enter the room, after an interval elsewhere, wrung her feelings too painfully ; better to keep her eyes fixed on the unmoving form, to overcome the dread by facing it.

She and her father seldom exchanged a word. The latter was experiencing human emotion, but at the same time he had no little anxiety regarding his material interests. It was ten days since he had learnt that there was no longer the least fear of a marriage between Jane and Sidney, seeing that Kirkwood was going to marry some one else,—a piece of news which greatly astonished him, and confirmed him in his judgment that he had been on the wrong tack in judging Kirkwood's character. At the same time he had been privily informed by Scawthorne of an event which had ever since kept him very uneasy,—Michael's withdrawal of his will from the hands of the solicitors. With what purpose this had been done Scawthorne could not conjecture; Mr. Percival had made no comment in his hearing. In all likelihood the will was now in this very room. Joseph surveyed every object again and again. He wondered whether Jane knew anything of the matter, but not all his cynicism could persuade him that at the present time her thoughts were taking the same direction as his own.

The day waned. Its sombre close was un-

speakingly mournful in this haunted chamber. Jane could not bear it; she hid her face and wept.

When the doctor came again, at six o'clock, he whispered to Joseph that the end was nearer than he had anticipated. Near, indeed; less than ten minutes after the warning had been given Michael ceased to breathe.

Jane knelt by the bed, convulsed with grief, unable to hear the words her father addressed to her. He sat for five minutes, then again spoke. She rose and replied.

"Will you come with us, Jane, or would you rather stay with Mrs. Byass?"

"I will stay, please, father."

He hesitated, but the thought that rose was even for him too ignoble to be entertained.

"As you please, my dear. Of course no one must enter your rooms but Mrs. Byass. I must go now, but I shall look in again to-night."

"Yes, father."

She spoke mechanically. He had to lead her from the room, and, on quitting the house, left her all but unconscious in Bessie's arms.

CHAPTER IX.

THE HEIR.

“AND you mean to say,” cried Clem, when she was in the cab with her husband speeding back to Burton Crescent—“you mean to say as you’ve left them people to do what they like?”

“I suppose I know my own business,” replied Joseph, wishing to convey the very impression which in fact he did,—that he had the will in his pocket.

On reaching home he sat down at once and penned a letter to Messrs. Percival & Peel, formally apprising them of what had happened. Clem sat by and watched him. Having sealed the envelope, he remarked :

“I’m going out for a couple of hours.”

“Then I shall go with you.”

“You’ll do nothing of the kind. Why, what do you mean, you great, gaping fool?” The agitation of his nerves made him break

into unaccustomed violence. "Do you suppose you're going to follow me everywhere for the next week? Are you afraid I shall run away? If I mean to do so, do you think you can stop me? You'll just wait here till I come back, which will be before ten o'clock. Do you hear?"

She looked at him fiercely, but his energy was too much for her, and perforce she let him go. As soon as he had left the house, she too sat down and indited a letter. It ran thus :

"DEAR MOTHER,—The old feller has gawn of it apened at jest after six e'clock if you want to now I shall come and sea you at ten e'clock to-morow moning and I beleve hes got the will but hes a beest and theers a game up you may take your hothe so I remain C. S."

This document she took to the nearest pillar-post, then returned and sat brooding.

By the first hansom available Joseph was driven right across London to a certain dull street in Chelsea. Before dismissing the vehicle he knocked at the door of a lodging-house and made inquiry for Mr. Scawthorne. To his surprise and satisfaction, Mr. Scaw-

thorne happened to be at home ; so the cabman was paid, and Joseph went up to the second floor.

In his shabby little room Scawthorne sat smoking and reading. It was a season of impecuniosity with him, and his mood was anything but cheerful. He did not rise when his visitor entered.

"Well now, what do you think brings me here?" exclaimed Joseph, when he had carefully closed the door.

"Hanged if I know, but it doesn't seem to be particularly bad news."

Indeed, Joseph had overcome his sensibilities by this time, and his aspect was one of joyous excitement. Seeing on the table a bottle of sherry, loosely corked, he pointed to it.

"If you don't mind, Scaw. I'm a bit upset, a bit flurried. Got another wine-glass?"

From the cupboard Scawthorne produced one, and bade the visitor help himself. His face began to express curiosity. Joseph tilted the draught down his throat and showed satisfaction.

"That does me good. I've had a troublesome day. It ain't often my feelings are tried."

“Well, what is it?”

“My boy, we are all mortal. I dare say you’ve heard that observation before; can you apply it to any particular case?”

Scawthorne was startled; he delayed a moment before speaking.

“You don’t mean to say”——

“Exactly. Died a couple of hours ago, after lying insensible all day, poor old man! I’ve just written your people a formal announcement. Now, what do you think of that? If you don’t mind, old fellow.”

He filled himself another glass, and tilted it off as before. Scawthorne had dropped his eyes to the ground, and stood in meditation.

“Now, what about the will?” pursued Joseph.

“You haven’t looked for it?” questioned his friend, with an odd look.

“Thought it more decent to wait a few hours. The girl was about, you see, and what’s more, my wife was. But have you heard anything since I saw you?”

“Why, yes. A trifle.”

“Out with it! What are you grinning about? Don’t keep me on hot coals.”

“Well, it’s amusing, and that’s the fact.

Take another glass of sherry; you'll need support."

"Oh, I'm prepared for the worst. He's cut me out altogether, eh? That comes of me meddling with the girl's affairs—damnation! When there wasn't the least need, either."

"A bad job. The fact is, Percival had a letter from him at midday yesterday. The senior had left the office; young Percival opened the letter, and spoke to me about it. Now, prepare yourself. The letter said that he had destroyed his former will, and would come to the office on Monday—that's *to-morrow*—to give instructions for a new one."

Joseph stood and stared.

"To-morrow? Why, then, there's *no will at all?*"

"An admirable deduction. I congratulate you on your logic."

Snowdon flung up his arms wildly, then began to leap about the room.

"Try another glass," said Scawthorne. "There's still a bottle in the cupboard; don't be afraid."

"And you mean to tell me it's all mine?"

"The wine? You're very welcome."

“Wine be damned! The money, my boy, the money! Scawthorne, I’m not a mean chap. As sure as you and me stand here, you shall have—you shall have a hundred pounds! I mean it; dash me, I mean it! You’ve been devilish useful to me; and what’s more—I haven’t done with you yet. Do you twig, old boy?”

“You mean that a confidential agent in England, unsuspected, may be needed?”

“Shouldn’t wonder if I do.”

“Can’t be managed under double the money, my good sir,” observed Scawthorne, with unmistakable seriousness. “Worth your while, I promise you. Have another glass. Fair commission. Think it over.”

“Look here! I shall have to make the girl an allowance.”

“There’s the filter-works. Don’t be stingey.”

Joseph was growing very red in the face. He drank glass after glass; he flung his arms about; he capered.

“Damn me if you shall call me that, Scaw! Two hundred it shall be. But what was the old cove up to? Why did he destroy the other will? What would the new one have been?”

"Can't answer either question, but it's probably as well for you that *to-morrow* never comes."

"Now just see how things turn out!" went on the other, in the joy of his heart. "All the thought and the trouble that I've gone through this last year, when I might have taken it easy and waited for chance to make me rich! Look at Kirkwood's business. There was you and me knocking our heads together and raising lumps on them, as you may say, to find out a plan of keeping him and Jane apart, when all the while we'd nothing to do but to look on and wait, if only we'd known. Now this is what I call the working of Providence, Scawthorne. Who's going to say, after this, that things ain't as they should be? Everything's for the best, my boy; I see that clearly enough."

"Decidedly," assented Scawthorne, with a smile. "The honest man is always rewarded in the long-run. And that reminds me; I too have had a stroke of luck."

He went on to relate that his position in the office of Percival & Peel was now nominally that of an articulated clerk, and that in three

years' time, if all went well, he would be received in the firm as junior partner.

"There's only one little project I am sorry to give up, in connection with your affairs, Snowdon. If it had happened that your daughter had inherited the money, why shouldn't I have had the honour of becoming your son-in-law?"

Joseph stared, then burst into hearty laughter.

"I tell you what," he said, recovering himself, "why should you give up that idea? She's as good a girl as you'll ever come across, I can tell you that, my boy. There's better-looking, but you won't find many as modest and good-hearted. Just make her acquaintance, and tell me if I've deceived you. And look here, Scawthorne; by George, I'll make a bargain with you! You say you'll be a partner in three years. Marry Jane when that day comes, and I'll give you a thousand for a wedding present. I mean it! What's more, I'll make my will on your marriage-day and leave everything I've got to you and her. There now!"

"What makes you so benevolent all at once?" inquired Scawthorne, blandly.

“Do you think I’ve got no fatherly feeling, man? Why, if it wasn’t for my wife, I’d ask nothing better than to settle down with Jane to keep house for me. She’s a good girl, I tell you, and I wish her happiness.”

“And do you think I’m exactly the man to make her a model husband?”

“I don’t see why not—now you’re going to be a partner in a good business. Don’t you think I’m ten times as honest a man to-day as I was yesterday? Poor devils can’t afford to be what they’d wish, in the way of honesty and decent living.”

“True enough, for once,” remarked the other, without irony.

“You think it over, Scaw. I’m a man of my word. You shall have your money as soon as things are straight; and if you can bring about that affair, I’ll do all I said,—so there’s my hand on it. Say the word, and I’ll make you acquainted with her before—before I take that little trip you know of, just for my health.”

“We’ll speak of it again.”

Thereupon they parted. In the course of the following day Scawthorne’s report received

official confirmation. Joseph pondered deeply with himself whether he should tell his wife the truth or not; there were arguments for both courses. By Tuesday morning he had decided for the truth; that would give more piquancy to a pleasant little jest he had in mind. At breakfast he informed her, as if casually, and it amused him to see that she did not believe him.

"You'll be anxious to tell your mother. Go and spend the day with her, but be back by five o'clock; then we'll talk things over. I have business with the lawyers again."

Clem repaired to the Close. Late in the afternoon she and her husband again met at home, and by this time Joseph's elation had convinced her that he was telling the truth. Never had he been in such a suave humour; he seemed to wish to make up for his late severities. Seating himself near her, he began pleasantly:

"Well, things might have been worse, eh?"

"I s'pose they might."

"I haven't spoken to Jane yet. Time enough after the funeral. What shall we do for the poor girl, eh?"

“How do I know?”

“You won’t grudge her a couple of pounds a week, or so, just to enable her to live with the Byasses, as she has been doing?”

“I s’pose the money’s your own to do what you like with.”

“Very kind of you to say so, my dear. But we’re well-to-do people now, and we must be polite to each other. Where shall we take a house, Clem? Would you like to be a bit out of town? There’s very nice places within easy reach of King’s Cross, you know, on the Great Northern. A man I know lives at Potter’s Bar, and finds it very pleasant; good air. Of course I must be within easy reach of business.”

She kept drawing her nails over a fold in her dress, making a scratchy sound.

“It happened just at the right time,” he continued. “The business wants a little more capital put into it. I tell you what it is, Clem; in a year or two we shall be coining money, old girl.”

“Shall you?”

“Right enough. There’s just one thing I’m a little anxious about; you won’t mind me

mentioning it? Do you think your mother'll expect us to do anything for her?"

Clem regarded him with cautious scrutiny. He was acting well, and her profound distrust began to be mingled with irritating uncertainty.

"What can she expect? If she does, she'll have to be disappointed, that's all."

"I don't want to seem mean, you know. But then she isn't so badly off herself, is she?"

"I know nothing about it. You'd better ask her."

And Clem grinned. Thereupon Joseph struck a facetious note, and for half-an-hour made himself very agreeable. Now for the first time, he said, could he feel really settled; life was smooth before him. They would have a comfortable home, the kind of place to which he could invite his friends; one or two excellent fellows he knew would bring their wives, and so Clem would have more society.

"Suppose you learn the piano, old girl? It wouldn't be amiss. By the bye, I hope they'll turn you out some creditable mourning. You'll have to find a West End dressmaker.

She listened, and from time to time smiled ambiguously. . . .

At noon of the next day Clem was walking on that part of the Thames Embankment which is between Waterloo Bridge and the Temple Pier. It was a mild morning, misty, but illuminated now and then with rays of sunlight, which gleamed dully upon the river and gave a yellowness to remote objects. At the distance of a dozen paces walked Bob Hewett; the two had had a difference in their conversation, and for some minutes kept thus apart, looking sullenly at the ground. Clem turned aside, and leaned her arms on the parapet. Presently her companion drew near and leaned in the same manner.

“What is it you want me to do?” he asked huskily. “Just speak plain, can’t you?”

“If you can’t understand,—if you *won’t*, that is,—it’s no good speakin’ plainer.”

“You said the other night as you didn’t care about his money. If you think he means hookin’ it, let him go, and good riddance.”

“That’s a fool’s way of talkin’. I’m not goin’ to lose it all, if I can help it. There’s a way of stoppin’ him, and of gettin’ the money too.”

They both stared down at the water; it

was full tide, and the muddy surface looked almost solid.

“ You wouldn’t get it all,” were Bob’s next words. “ I’ve been asking about that.”

“ You have ? Who did you ask ? ”

“ Oh, a feller you don’t know. You’d only have a third part of it, and the girl ’ud get the rest.”

“ What do you call a third part ? ”

So complete was her stupidity, that Bob had to make a laborious explanation of this mathematical term. She could have understood what was meant by a half or a quarter, but the unfamiliar “ third ” conveyed no distinct meaning.

“ I don’t care,” she said at length. “ That ’ud be enough.”

“ Clem,—you’d better leave this job alone. You’d better, I warn you.”

“ I shan’t.”

Another long silence. A steamboat drew up to the Temple Pier, and a yellow shaft of sunlight fell softly upon its track in the water.

“ What do you want me to do ? ” Bob recommenced. “ *How ?* ”

Their eyes met, and in the woman’s gaze he

found a horrible fascination, a devilish allure-ment to that which his soul shrank from. She lowered her voice.

“There’s lots of ways. It ’ud be easy to make it seem as somebody did it just to rob him. He’s always out late at night.”

His face was much the colour of the muddy water yellowed by that shaft of sunlight. His lips quivered. “I dursn’t, Clem. I tell you plain, I dursn’t.”

“Coward!” she snarled at him, savagely. “Coward! All right, Mr. Bob. You go your way, and I’ll go mine.”

“Listen here, Clem,” he gasped out, laying his hand on her arm. “I’ll think about it. I won’t say no. Give me a day to think about it.”

“Oh, we know what your thinkin’ means.”

They talked for some time longer, and before they parted Bob had given a promise to do more than think.

The long, slouching strides with which he went up from the embankment to the Strand gave him the appearance of a man partly overcome with drink. For hours he walked about the City, in complete oblivion of every-

thing external. Only when the lights began to shine from shop-windows did he consciously turn to his own district. It was raining now. The splashes of cool moisture made him aware how feverishly hot his face was.

When he got among the familiar streets he went slinkingly, hurrying round corners, avoiding glances. Almost at a run he turned into Merlin Place, and he burst into his room as though he were pursued.

Pennyloaf had now but one child to look after, a girl of two years, a feeble thing. Her own state was wretched; professedly recovered from illness, she felt so weak, so low-spirited, that the greater part of her day was spent in crying. The least exertion was too much for her; but for frequent visits from Jane Snowdon she must have perished for very lack of wholesome food. She was crying when startled by her husband's entrance, and though she did her best to hide the signs of it, Bob saw.

"When are you going to stop that?" he shouted.

She shrank away, looking at him with fear in her red eyes.

“Stop your snivelling, and get me some tea!”

It was only of late that Pennyloaf had come to regard him with fear. His old indifference and occasional brutality of language had made her life a misery, but she had never looked for his return home with anything but anxious longing. Now the anticipation was mingled with dread. He not only had no care for her, not only showed that he felt her a burden upon him; his disposition now was one of hatred, and the kind of hatred which sooner or later breaks out in ferocity. Bob would not have come to this pass—at all events not so soon—if he had been left to the dictates of his own nature; he was infected by the savagery of the woman who had taken possession of him. Her lust of cruelty crept upon him like a disease, the progress of which was hastened by all the circumstances of his disorderly life. The man was conscious of his degradation; he knew how he had fallen ever since he began criminal practices; he knew the increasing hopelessness of his resolves to have done with dangers and recover his peace of mind. The loss of his daily work, in consequence of irregularity, was the last thing needed to complete

his ruin. He did not even try to get new employment, feeling that such a show of honest purpose was useless. Corruption was eating to his heart; from every interview with Clem he came away a feebler and a baser being. And upon the unresisting creature who shared his home he had begun to expend the fury of his self-condemnation.

He hated her because Clem bade him do so. He hated her because her suffering rebuked him, because he must needs be at the cost of keeping her alive, because he was bound to her.

As she moved painfully about the room he watched her with cruel, dangerous eyes. There was a thought tormenting his brain, a terrifying thought he had pledged himself not to dismiss, and it seemed to exasperate him against Pennyloaf. He had horrible impulses, twitches along his muscles; every second the restraint of keeping in one position grew more unendurable, yet he feared to move.

Pennyloaf had the ill-luck to drop a saucer, and it broke on the floor. In the same instant he leapt up and sprang on her, seized her brutally by the shoulders and flung her with all his force against the nearest wall. At her

scream the child set up a shrill cry, and this increased his rage. With his clenched fist he dealt blow after blow at the half-prostrate woman, speaking no word, but uttering a strange sound, such as might come from some infuriate animal. Pennyloaf still screamed, till at length the door was thrown open and their neighbour, Mrs. Griffin, showed herself.

“Well, I never!” she cried, wrathfully, rushing upon Bob. “Now you just stop that, young man! I thought it ’ud be comin’ to this before long. I saw you was goin’ that way.”

The mildness of her expressions was partly a personal characteristic, partly due to Mrs. Griffin’s very large experience of such scenes as this. Indignant she might be, but the situation could not move her to any unwonted force of utterance. Enough that Bob drew back as soon as he was bidden, and seemed from his silence to be half-ashamed of himself.

Pennyloaf let herself lie at full length on the floor, her hands clutched protectingly about her head; she sobbed in a quick, terrified way, and appeared powerless to stop, even when Mrs. Griffin tried to raise her.

“What’s he been a-usin’ you like this for?”

the woman kept asking. "There, there now! He shan't hit you no more, he shan't!"

Whilst she spoke Bob turned away and went from the room.

From Merlin Place he struck off into Pentonville and walked towards King's Cross at his utmost speed. Not that he had any object in hastening, but a frenzy goaded him along, faster, faster, till the sweat poured from him. From King's Cross, northwards; out to Holloway, to Hornsey. A light rain was ceaselessly falling; at one time he took off his hat and walked some distance bareheaded, because it was a pleasure to feel the rain trickle over him. From Hornsey by a great circuit he made back for Islington. Here he went into a public-house, to quench the thirst that had grown unbearable. He had but a shilling in his pocket, and in bringing it out he was reminded of the necessity of getting more money. He was to have met Jack Bartley to-night, long before this hour.

He took the direction for Smithfield, and soon reached the alley near Bartholomew's Hospital where Bartley dwelt. As he entered the street he saw a small crowd gathered about

a public-house door ; he hurried nearer, and found that the object of interest was a man in the clutch of two others. The latter, he perceived at a glance, were police-officers in plain clothes ; the man arrested was—Jack Bartley himself.

Jack was beside himself with terror ; he had only that moment been brought out of the bar, and was pleading shrilly in an agony of cowardice.

“ It ain’t me as made ’em ! I never made one in my life ! I’ll tell you who it is—I’ll tell you where to find him—it’s Bob Hewett as lives in Merlin Place ! You’ve took the wrong man. It ain’t me as made ’em ! I’ll tell you the whole truth, or may I never speak another word ! It’s Bob Hewett made ’em all—he lives in Merlin Place, Clerkenwell. I’ll tell you ”——

Thus far had Bob heard before he recovered sufficiently from the shock to move a limb. The officers were urging their prisoner forward, grinning and nodding to each other, whilst several voices from the crowd shouted abusively at the poltroon whose first instinct was to betray his associate. Bob turned his face

away and walked on. He did not dare to run, yet the noises behind him kept his heart leaping with dread. A few paces and he was out of the alley. Even yet he durst not run. He had turned in the unlucky direction; the crowd was still following. For five minutes he had to keep advancing, then at last he was able to move off at right angles. The crowd passed the end of the street.

Only then did complete panic get possession of him. With a bound forward like that of a stricken animal he started in blind flight. He came to a crossing, and rushed upon it regardless of the traffic. Before he could gain the farther pavement the shaft of a cart struck him on the breast and threw him down. The vehicle was going at a slow place, and could be stopped almost immediately; he was not touched by the wheel. A man helped him to his feet and inquired if he were hurt.

“Hurt? No, no; it’s all right.”

To the surprise of those who had witnessed the accident, he walked quickly on, scarcely feeling any pain. But in a few minutes there came a sense of nausea and a warm rush in his throat; he staggered against the wall and

vomited a quantity of blood. Again he was surrounded by sympathising people; again he made himself free of them and hastened on. But by now he was suffering acutely; he could not run, so great was the pain it cost him when he began to breathe quickly. His mouth was full of blood again.

Where could he find a hiding-place? The hunters were after him, and however great his suffering, he must go through it in secrecy. But in what house could he take refuge? He had not money enough to pay for a lodging.

He looked about him; tried to collect his thoughts. By this time the police would have visited Merlin Place; they would be waiting there to trap him. He was tempted towards Farringdon Road Buildings; surely his father would not betray him, and he was in such dire need of kindly help. But it would not be safe; the police would search there.

Shooter's Gardens? There was the room where lived Pennyloaf's drunken mother and her brother. They would not give him up. He could think of no other refuge, at all events, and must go there if he would not drop in the street.

CHAPTER X.

MAD JACK'S DREAM.

IT was not much more than a quarter of an hour's walk, but pain and fear made the distance seem long; he went out of his way, too, for the sake of avoiding places that were too well lighted. The chief occupation of his thoughts was in conjecturing what could have led to Bartley's arrest. Had the fellow been such a fool as to attempt passing a bad coin when he carried others of the same kind in his pocket? Or had the arrest of some other "pal" in some way thrown suspicion on Jack? Be it as it might, the game was up. With the usual wisdom which comes too late, Bob asked himself how he could ever have put trust in Bartley, whom he knew to be as mean-spirited a cur as breathed. On the chance of making things easier for himself, Jack would betray every secret in his possession. What hope

was there of escaping capture, even if a hiding-place could be found for a day or two? If he had his hand on Jack Bartley's gizzard!

Afraid to appear afraid, in dread lest his muddy clothing should attract observation, he kept, as often as possible, the middle of the road, and with relief saw at length the narrow archway, with its descending steps, which was one entrance to Shooter's Gardens. As usual, two or three loafers were hanging about here, exchanging blasphemies and filthy vocables, but, even if they recognised him, there was not much fear of their giving assistance to the police. With head bent he slouched past them, unchallenged. At the bottom of the steps, where he was in all but utter darkness, his foot slipped on garbage of some kind, and with a groan he fell on his side.

"Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall," cried a high-pitched voice from close by.

Bob knew that the speaker was the man notorious in this locality as Mad Jack. Raising himself with difficulty, he looked round and saw a shape crouching in the corner.

"What is the principal thing?" continued

the crazy voice. "Wisdom is the principal thing."

And upon that followed a long speech which to Bob sounded as gibberish, but which was in truth tolerably good French, a language Mad Jack was fond of using, though he never made known how he had acquired it.

Bob stumbled on, and quickly came to the house where he hoped to find a refuge. The door was, of course, open; he went in and groped his way up the staircase. A knock at the door of the room which he believed to be still tenanted by Mrs. Candy and her son brought no reply. He turned the handle, but found that the door was locked.

It was not late, only about ten o'clock. Stephen Candy could not, of course, be back yet from his work, and the woman was probably drinking somewhere. But he must make sure that they still lived here. Going down to the floor below, he knocked at the room occupied by the Hope family, and Mrs. Hope, opening the door a few inches, asked his business.

"Does Mrs. Candy still live upstairs?" he inquired in a feigned voice, and standing back in the darkness.

“For all I know.”

And the door closed sharply. He had no choice but to wait and see if either of his acquaintances returned. For a few minutes he sat on the staircase, but as at any moment some one might stumble over him, he went down to the back-door, which was open, like that in front, and passed out into the stone-paved yard. Here he seated himself on the ground, leaning against a corner of the wall. He was suffering much from his injury, but could at all events feel secure from the hunters.

The stones were wet, and rain fell upon him. As he looked up at the lighted windows in the back of the house, he thought of Pennyloaf, who by this time most likely knew his danger. Would she be glad of it, feeling herself revenged? His experience of her did not encourage him to believe that. To all his ill-treatment she had never answered with anything but tears and submission. He found himself wishing she were near, to be helpful to him in his suffering.

Clem could not learn immediately what had come to pass. Finding he did not keep his

appointment for the day after to-morrow, she would conclude that he had drawn back. But perhaps Jack Bartley's case would be in the newspapers on that day, and his own name might appear in the evidence before the magistrates; if Clem learnt the truth in that way, she would be not a little surprised. He had never hinted to her the means by which he had been obtaining money.

Voices began to sound from the passage within the house; several young fellows, one or other of whom probably lived here, had entered to be out of the rain. One voice, very loud and brutal, Bob quickly recognised; it was that of Ned Higgs, the ruffian with whom Bartley's wife had taken up. The conversation was very easy to overhear; it contained no reference to the "copping" of Jack.

"Fag ends!" this and that voice kept crying.

Bob understood. One of the noble company had been fortunate enough to pick up the end of a cigar somewhere, and it was the rule among them that he who called out "Fag-ends!" established a claim for a few whiffs. In this way the delicacy was passing from mouth to mouth. That the game should end

in quarrel was quite in order, and sure enough, before very long, Ned Higgs was roaring his defiance to a companion who had seized the bit of tobacco unjustly.

“ I ’ollered fag-end after Snuffy Bill ! ”

“ You’re a —— liar ! I did ! ”

“ You ! You’re a —— —— —— ! I’ll —— your —— in arf a —— second ! ”

Then came the sound of a scuffle, the thud of blows, the wild-beast bellowing of infuriate voices. Above all could be heard the roar of Ned Higgs. A rush, and it was plain that the combatants had gone out into the alley to have more room. For a quarter of an hour the yells from their drink-sodden throats echoed among the buildings. Quietness was probably caused by the interference of police ; knowing that, Bob shrank together in his lurking-place.

When all had been still for some time he resolved to go upstairs again and try the door, for his breathing grew more and more painful, and there was a whirling in his head which made him fear that he might become insensible. To rise was more difficult than he had imagined ; his head overweighted him, all but caused him to plunge forward ; he groped this

way and that with his hands, seeking vainly for something to cling to on the whitewashed wall. In his depth of utter misery he gave way and sobbed several times. Then once more he had the warm taste of blood in his mouth. Terror-stricken, he staggered into the house.

This time a voice answered to his knock. He opened the door.

The room contained no article of furniture. In one corner lay some rags, and on the mantelpiece stood a tin teapot, two cups, and a plate. There was no fire, but a few pieces of wood lay near the hearth, and at the bottom of the open cupboard remained a very small supply of coals. A candle made fast in the neck of a bottle was the source of light.

On the floor was sitting, or lying, an animated object, indescribable; Bob knew it for Mrs. Candy. Her eyes looked up at him apprehensively.

"I want to stay the night over, if you'll let me," he said, when he had closed the door. "I've got to hide away; nobody mustn't know as I'm here."

"You're welcome," the woman replied, in a voice which was horrible to hear.

Then she paid no more attention to him, but leaned her head upon her hand and began a regular moaning, as if she suffered some dull persistent pain.

Bob crept up to the wall and let himself sink there. He could not reflect for more than a minute or two continuously ; his brain then became a mere confused whirl. In one of the intervals of his perfect consciousness he asked Mrs. Candy if Stephen would come here to-night. She did not heed him till he had twice repeated the question, and then she started and looked at him in wild fear.

“ Will Stephen be coming ? ”

“ Stephen ? Yes, yes. I shouldn’t wonder. ”

She seemed to fall asleep as soon as she had spoken ; her head dropped heavily on the boards.

Not long after midnight the potman made his appearance. As always, on returning from his sixteen-hour day of work, he was all but insensible with fatigue. Entering the room, he turned his white face with an expression of stupid wonderment to the corner in which Bob lay. The latter raised himself to a sitting posture.

"That you, Bob Hewett?"

"I want to stop here over the night," replied the other, speaking with difficulty. "I can't go home. There's something up."

"With Pennyloaf?"

"No. I've got to hide away. And I'm feeling bad—awful bad. Have you got anything to drink?"

Stephen, having listened with the face of a somnambulist, went to the mantelpiece and looked into the teapot. It was empty.

"You can go to the tap in the yard," he said.

"I couldn't get so far. Oh, I feel bad!"

"I'll fetch you some water."

A good-hearted animal, this poor Stephen; a very tolerable human being, had he had fair-play. He would not abandon his wretched mother, though to continue living with her meant hunger and cold and yet worse evils. For himself, his life was supported chiefly on the three pints of liquor which he was allowed every day. His arms and legs were those of a living skeleton; his poor idiotic face was made yet more repulsive by disease. Yet you could have seen that he was the brother of Pennyloaf; there was Pennyloaf's submissive beast-

of-burden look in his eyes, and his voice had something that reminded one of hers.

"The coppers after you?" he whispered, stooping down to Bob with the teacup he had filled with water.

Bob nodded, then drained the cup eagerly.

"I got knocked down by a cab or something," he added. "It hit me just here. I may feel better when I've rested a bit. Haven't you got no furniture left?"

"They took it last Saturday was a week. Took it for rent. I thought we didn't owe nothing, but mother told me she'd paid when she hadn't. I got leave to stop, when I showed 'em as I could pay in future; but they wouldn't trust me to make up them three weeks. They took the furniture. It's 'ard, I call it. I asked my guv'nor if it was law for them to take mother's bed-things, an' he said yes it was. When it's for rent they can take everything, even to your beddin' an' tools."

Yes; they can take everything. How foolish of Stephen Candy and his tribe not to be born of the class of landlords! The inconvenience of having no foothold on the earth's surface is so manifest.

“I couldn’t say nothing to her,” he continued, nodding towards the prostrate woman. “She was sorry for it, an’ you can’t ask no more. It was my fault for trustin’ her with the money to pay, but I get a bit careless now an’ then, an’ forgot. You do look bad, Bob, and there’s no mistake. Would you feel better if I lighted a bit o’ fire?”

“Yes; I feel cold. I was hot just now.”

“You needn’t be afraid o’ the coals. Mother goes round the streets after the coal-carts, an’ you wouldn’t believe what a lot she picks up some days. You see, we’re neither of us in the ’ouse very often; we don’t burn much.”

He lit a fire, and Bob dragged himself near to it. In the meantime the quietness of the house was suffering a disturbance familiar to its denizens. Mr. Hope—you remember Mr. Hope?—had just returned from an evening at the public-house, and was bent on sustaining his reputation for unmatched vigour of language. He was quarrelling with his wife and daughters; their high notes of vituperation mingled in the most effective way with his manly thunder. To hear Mr. Hope’s expressions, a stranger would have imagined him on

the very point of savagely murdering all his family.

Another voice became audible. It was that of Ned Higgs, who had opened his door to bellow curses at the disturbers of his rest.

"They'll be wakin' mother," said Stephen. "There, I knew they would."

Mrs. Candy stirred, and after a few vain efforts to raise herself, started up suddenly. She fixed her eyes on the fire, which was just beginning to blaze, and uttered a dreadful cry, a shriek of mad terror.

"O God!" groaned her son. "I hope it ain't goin' to be one of her bad nights. Mother, mother! what's wrong with you? See, come to the fire an' warm yourself, mother."

She repeated the cry two or three times, but with less violence; then, as though exhausted, she fell face downwards, her arms folded about her head. The moaning which Bob had heard earlier in the evening recommenced.

Happily, it was not to be one of her bad nights. Fits of the horrors only came upon her twice before morning. Towards one o'clock Stephen had sunk into a sleep which scarcely any conceivable uproar could have broken; he

lay with his head on his right arm, his legs stretched out at full length ; his breathing was light. Bob was much later in getting rest. As often as he slumbered for an instant, the terrible image of his fear rose manifest before him ; he saw himself in the clutch of his hunters, just like Jack Bartley, and woke to lie quivering. Must not that be the end of it, sooner or later ? Might he not as well give himself up to-morrow ? But the thought of punishment such as his crime receives was unendurable. It haunted him in nightmare when sheer exhaustion had at length weighed down his eyelids.

Long before daybreak he was conscious again, tormented with thirst and his head aching woefully. Some one had risen in the room above, and was tramping about in heavy boots. The noise seemed to disturb Mrs. Candy ; she cried out in her sleep. In a few minutes the early riser came forth and began to descend the stairs ; he was going to his work.

A little while, and in the court below a voice shouted, " Bill ! Bill ! " Another worker being called, doubtless.

At seven o'clock Stephen roused himself.

He took a piece of soap from a shelf of the cupboard, threw a dirty rag over his arm, and went down to wash at the tap in the yard. Only on returning did he address Bob.

“Feelin’ any better?”

“I think so. But I’m very bad.”

“Are you goin’ to stay here?”

“I don’t know.”

“Got any money?”

“Yes. Ninepence. Could you get me something to drink?”

Stephen took twopence, went out, and speedily returned with a large mug of coffee; from his pocket he brought forth a lump of cake, which had cost a halfpenny. This, he thought, might tempt a sick appetite. His own breakfast he would take at the coffee-shop.

“Mother’ll get you anything else you want,” he said. “She knows herself generally first thing in the morning. Let her take back the mug; I had to leave threepence on it.”

So Stephen also went forth to his labour,—in his case, it may surely be said, the curse of curses. . . .

At this hour Pennyloaf bestirred herself

after a night of weeping. Last evening the police had visited her room, and had searched it thoroughly. The revelation amazed her; she would not believe the charge that was made against her husband. She became angry with Mrs. Griffin when that practical woman said she was not at all surprised. Utterly gone was her resentment of Bob's latest cruelty. His failure to return home seemed to prove that he had been arrested, and she could think of nothing but the punishment that awaited him.

"It's penal servitude," remarked Mrs. Griffin, frankly. "Five, or p'r'aps ten, years. I've heard of 'em gettin' sent for life."

Pennyloaf would not believe in the possibility of this befalling her husband. It was too cruel. There would be some pity, some mercy. She had a confused notion of witnesses being called to give a man a good character, and strengthened herself in the thought of what she would say, under such circumstances, on Bob's behalf. "He's been a good 'usband," she kept repeating to Mrs. Griffin, and to the other neighbours who crowded to indulge their curiosity. "There's nobody can say as he ain't been a good 'usband; it's a lie if they do."

By eight o'clock she was at the police-station. With fear she entered the ugly doorway and approached a policeman who stood in the ante-room. When she had made her inquiry, the man referred her to the inspector. She was asked many questions, but to her own received no definite reply ; she had better look in again the next morning.

"It's my belief they ain't got him," said Mrs. Griffin. "He's had a warnin' from his pals."

Pennyloaf would dearly have liked to communicate with Jane Snowdon, but shame prevented her. All day she stood by the house-door, looking eagerly now this way, now that, with an unreasoning hope that Bob might show himself. She tried to believe that he was only keeping away because of his behaviour to her the night before ; it was the first time he had laid hand upon her, and he felt ashamed of himself. He would come back, and this charge against him would be proved false ; Pennyloaf could not distinguish between her desire that something might happen and the probability of its doing so.

But darkness fell upon the streets, and her

watch was kept in rain. She dreaded the thought of passing another night in uncertainty. Long ago her tears had dried up; she had a parched throat and trembling, feverish hands. Between seven and eight o'clock she went to Mrs. Griffin and begged her to take care of the child for a little while.

"I'm goin' to see if I can hear anything about him. Somebody may know where he is."

And first of all she directed her steps to Shooter's Gardens. It was very unlikely that her mother could be of any use, but she would seek there. Afterwards she must go to Farringdon Road Buildings, though never yet had she presented herself to Bob's father.

You remember that the Gardens had an offshoot, which was known simply as The Court. In this blind alley there stood, throughout the day, a row of baked-potato ovens, ten or a dozen of them, chained together, the property of a local capitalist who let them severally to men engaged in this business. At seven o'clock of an evening fires were wont to be lighted under each of these baking-machines, preparatory to their being wheeled away, each to its customary

street-corner. Now the lighting of fires entails the creation of smoke, and whilst these ten or twelve ovens were getting ready to bake potatoes the Court was in a condition not easily described. A single lamp existed for the purpose of giving light to the alley, and at no time did this serve much more than to make darkness visible; at present the blind man would have fared as well in that retreat as he who had eyes, and the marvel was how those who lived there escaped suffocation. In the Gardens themselves volumes of dense smoke every now and then came driven along by the cold gusts; the air had a stifling smell and a bitter taste.

Pennyloaf found nothing remarkable in this phenomenon; it is hard to say what would have struck her as worthy of indignant comment in her world of little ease. But near the entrance to the Court, dimly discernible amid sagging fumes, was a cluster of people, and as everything of that kind just now excited her apprehensions, she drew near to see what was happening. The gathering was around Mad Jack; he looked more than usually wild, and with one hand raised above his head was

on the point of relating a vision he had had the night before.

“Don’t laugh! Don’t any of you laugh; for as sure as I live it was an angel stood in the room and spoke to me. There was a light such as none of you ever saw, and the angel stood in the midst of it. And he said to me: ‘Listen, whilst I reveal to you the truth, that you may know where you are and what you are; and this is done for a great purpose.’ And I fell down on my knees, but never a word could I have spoken. Then the angel said: ‘You are passing through a state of punishment. You, and all the poor among whom you live; all those who are in suffering of body and darkness of mind, were once rich people, with every blessing the world can bestow, with every opportunity of happiness in yourselves and of making others happy. Because you made an ill use of your wealth, because you were selfish and hard-hearted and oppressive and sinful in every kind of indulgence,—therefore after death you received the reward of wickedness. This life you are now leading is that of the damned; this place to which you are confined is Hell! There is no escape for

you. From poor you shall become poorer; the older you grow the lower shall you sink in want and misery; at the end there is waiting for you, one and all, a death in abandonment and despair. This is Hell—Hell—Hell!”

His voice had risen in pitch, and the last cry was so terrifying that Pennyloaf fled to be out of hearing. She reached the house to which her visit was, and in the dark passage leaned for a moment against the wall, trembling all over. Then she began to ascend the stairs. At Mrs. Candy's door she knocked gently. There was at first no answer, but when she had knocked again, a strange voice that she did not recognise asked, “Who's that?” It seemed to come from low down, as if the speaker were lying on the floor.

“It's me,” she replied, again trembling, she knew not with what fear. “Mrs. Hewett—Pennyloaf.”

“Are you alone?”

She bent down, listening eagerly.

“Who's that speakin'?”

“Are you alone?”

Strange; the voice was again different, very feeble, a thick whisper.

"Yes, there's nobody else. Can I come in?"

There was a shuffling sound, then the key turned in the lock. Pennyloaf entered, and found herself in darkness. She shrank back.

"Who's there? Is it you, mother? Is it you, Stephen?"

Some one touched her, at the same time shutting the door; and the voice whispered:

"Penny—it's me—Bob."

She uttered a cry, stretching out her hands. A head was leaning against her, and she bent down to lay hers against it.

"O Bob! What are you doin' here? Why are you in the dark? What's the matter, Bob?"

"I've had an accident, Penny. I feel awful bad. Your mother's gone out to buy a candle. Have they been coming after me?"

"Yes, yes. But I didn't know you was here. I came to ask if they knew where you was. O Bob! what's happened to you? Why are you lyin' there, Bob?"

She had folded her arms about him, and held his face to hers, sobbing, kissing him.

"It's all up," he gasped. "I've been getting worse all day. You'll have to fetch the parish

doctor. They'll have me, but I can't help it. I feel as if I was going."

"They shan't take you, Bob. Oh no, they shan't. The doctor needn't know who you are."

"It was a cab knocked me down, when I was running. I'm awful bad, Penny. You'll do something for me, won't you?"

"Oh, why didn't you send mother for me?"

The door opened. It was Mrs. Candy who entered. She slammed the door, turned the key, and exclaimed in a low voice of alarm:

"Bob, there's the p'lice downstairs! They come just this minute. There's one gone to the back-door, and there's one talkin' to Mrs. Hope at the front."

"Then they've followed Pennyloaf," he replied, in a tone of despair. "They've followed Pennyloaf."

It was the truth. She had been watched all day, and was now tracked to Shooter's Gardens, to this house. Mrs. Candy struck a match, and for an instant illuminated the wretched room; she looked at the two, and they at length saw each other's faces. Then the little flame was extinguished, and a red spot marked the place where the remnant of the match lay.

“Shall I light the candle?” the woman asked in a whisper.

Neither replied, for there was a heavy foot on the stairs. It came nearer. A hand tried the door, then knocked loudly.

“Mrs. Candy,” cried a stranger.

The three crouched together, terror-stricken, holding their breath. Pennyloaf pressed her husband in an agonised embrace.

“Mrs. Candy, you’re wanted on business. Open the door. If you don’t open, we shall force it.”

“No—no!” Pennyloaf whispered in her mother’s ear. “They shan’t come in! Don’t stir.”

“Are you going to open the door?”

It was a different speaker,—brief, stern. Ten seconds, and there came a tremendous crash; the crazy door, the whole wall, quivered and cracked and groaned. The crash was repeated, and effectually; with a sound of ripping wood the door flew open and a light streamed into the room.

Useless, Pennyloaf, useless. That fierce kick, making ruin of your rotten barrier, is dealt with the whole force of Law, of Society;

you might as well think of resisting death when your hour shall come.

"There he is," observed one of the men, calmly. "Hollo! what's up?"

"You can't take him away!" Pennyloaf cried, falling down again by Bob and clinging to him. "He's ill. You can't take him like this!"

"Ill, is he? Then the sooner our doctor sees him the better. Up you get, my man!"

But there are some things that even Law and Society cannot command. Bob lay insensible. Shamming? Well, no; it seemed not. Send for a stretcher, quickly.

No great delay. Pennyloaf sat in mute anguish, Bob's head on her lap. On the staircase was a crowd of people, talking, shouting, whistling; presently they were cleared away by a new arrival of officials. Room for Law and Society!

The stretcher arrived; the senseless body was carried down and laid upon it,—a policeman at each end, and, close clinging, Pennyloaf.

Above the noise of the crowd rose a shrill, wild voice, chanting:

"All ye works of the Lord, bless ye the Lord; praise Him and magnify Him for ever!"

CHAPTER XI.

JOSEPH TRANSACTS MUCH BUSINESS.

AMID the anguish of heart and nerve which she had to endure whilst her grandfather lay dead in the house, Jane found and clung to one thought of consolation. He had not closed his eyes in the bitterness of disappointment. The end might have come on that miserable day when her weakness threatened the defeat of all his hopes, and how could she then have borne it? True or not, it would have seemed to her that she had killed him ; she could not have looked on his face, and all the rest of her life would have been remorsefully shadowed. Now the dead features were unrepachable ; nay, when she overcame her childish tremors and gazed calmly, it was easy to imagine that he smiled. Death itself had come without pain. An old man, weary after his long journeys,

after his many griefs and the noble striving of his thought, surely he rested well.

During the last days he had been more affectionate with her than was his habit; she remembered it with gratitude. Words of endearment seldom came to his lips, but since the reconciliation he had more than once spoken tenderly. Doubtless he was anxious to assure her that she had again all his confidence. Strengthening herself in that reflection, she strove to put everything out of her mind save the duty which must henceforth direct her. Happily, there could be no more strife with the promptings of her weaker self; circumstances left but one path open before her; and that, however difficult, the one she desired to tread. Henceforth memory must dwell on one thing only in the past, her rescue by Michael Snowdon, her nurture under his care. Though he could no longer speak, the recollection of his words must be her unfailing impulse. In her his spirit must survive, his benevolence still be operative.

At her wish, her father acquainted Sidney Kirkwood with what had happened. Sidney did not visit her, but he wrote a letter, which,

having read it many times, she put carefully away to be a resource if ever her heart failed. Mr. Percival came to the house on Monday, in the company of Joseph Snowdon; he was sympathetic, but made no direct reference to her position either now or in the future. Whilst he and her father transacted matters of business in the upper rooms, Jane remained downstairs with Mrs. Byass. Before quitting the house he asked her if she had had any communication with Miss Lant yet.

“I ought to write and tell her,” replied Jane.

“I will do so for you,” said the lawyer, kindly.

And on taking leave he held her hand for a moment, looking compassionately into her pale face.

On Thursday morning there arrived a letter from Miss Lant, who happened to be out of town and grieved that she could not return in time for the funeral, which would be that day. There was nothing about the future, excepting a promise that the writer would come very shortly.

Michael was buried at Abney Park Ceme-

tery ; no ray of sunlight fell upon his open grave, but the weather was mild, and among the budded trees passed a breath which was the promise of spring. Joseph Snowden and the Byasses were Jane's only companions in the mourning-carriage ; but at the cemetery they were joined by Sidney Kirkwood. Jane saw him and felt the pressure of his hand, but she could neither speak nor understand anything that was said to her.

On Friday morning, before she had made a show of eating the breakfast Bessie Byass prepared for her, a visitor arrived.

"She says her name's Mrs. Griffin," said Bessie, "and she has something very important to tell you. Do you feel you can see her?"

"Mrs. Griffin ? Oh, I remember ; she lives in the same house as Pennyloaf. Yes ; let her come in."

The woman was introduced to the Byasses' parlour, which Bessie thought more cheerful for Jane just now than the room upstairs.

"Have you heard anything of what's been goin' on with the Hewetts, Miss?" she began.

"No. I haven't been able to go out this week. I've had trouble at home."

“I see at once as you was in mournin’, Miss, an’ I’m sorry for it. You’re lookin’ nothing like yourself. I don’t know whether it’s right to upset you with other people’s bothers, but there’s that poor Mrs. Hewett in such a state, and I said as I’d run round, ’cause she seems to think there’s nobody else can come to her help as you can. I always knew as something o’ this kind ’ud be ’appenin’.”

“But what is it? What has happened?”

Jane felt her energies revive at this appeal for help. It was the best thing that could have befallen, now that she was wearily despondent after yesterday’s suffering.

“Her ’usband’s dead, Miss.”

“Dead?”

“But that ain’t the worst of it. He was took by the perlice last night, which they wanted him for makin’ bad money. I always have said as it’s a cruel thing that; ’cause how can you tell who gets the bad coin, an’ it may be some pore person as can’t afford to lose not a ’apenny. But that’s what he’s been up to, an’ this long time, as it appears.”

In her dialect, which requires so many words for the narration of a simple story, Mrs. Griffin

told what she knew concerning Bob Hewett's accident and capture; his death had taken place early this morning, and Pennyloaf was all but crazy with grief. To Jane these things sounded so extraordinary that for some time she could scarcely put a question, but sat in dismay, listening to the woman's prolix description of all that had come to pass since Wednesday evening. At length she called for Mrs. Byass, for whose benefit the story was repeated.

"I'm sure you oughtn't to go there to-day," was Bessie's opinion. "You've quite enough trouble of your own, my dear."

"And that's just what I was a-sayin', mum," assented Mrs. Griffin, who had won Bessie's highest opinion by her free use of respectful forms of address. "I never saw no one look iller, as you may say, than the young lady."

"Yes, yes, I will go," said Jane, rising. "My trouble's nothing to hers. Oh, I shall go at once."

"But remember your father's coming at half-past nine," urged Bessie, "and he said he wanted to speak to you particular."

"What is the time now? A quarter to

nine. I can be back by half-past, I think, and then I can go again. Father wouldn't mind waiting a few minutes. I must go at once, Mrs. Byass."

She would hear no objection, and speedily left the house in Mrs. Griffin's company.

At half-past nine, punctually, Mr. Snowdon's double knock sounded at the door. Joseph looked more respectable than ever in his black frock-coat and silk hat with the deep band. His bow to Mrs. Byass was solemn, but gallant; he pressed her fingers like a clergyman paying a visit of consolation, and in a subdued voice made affectionate inquiry after his daughter.

"She has slept, I hope, poor child?"

Bessie took him into the sitting-room, and explained Jane's absence.

"A good girl; a good girl," he remarked, after listening with elevated brows. "But she must be careful of her health. My visit this morning is on matters of business; no doubt she will tell you the principal points of our conversation afterwards. An excellent friend you have been to her, Mrs. Byass—excellent."

"I'm sure I don't see how any one could help liking her," said Bessie, inwardly delighted with the expectation of hearing at length what Jane's circumstances really were.

"Indeed, so good a friend," pursued Joseph, "that I'm afraid it would distress her if she could no longer live with you. And the fact is"—he bent forward and smiled sadly—"I'm sure I may speak freely to you, Mrs. Byass,—but the fact is, that I'm very doubtful indeed whether she could be happy if she lived with Mrs. Snowdon. I suppose there's always more or less difficulty where step-children are concerned, and in this case—well, I fear the incompatibility would be too great. To be sure, it places me in a difficult position. Jane's very young—very young; only just turned seventeen, poor child! Out of the question for her to live with strangers. I had some hopes—I wonder whether I ought to speak of it? You know Mr. Kirkwood?"

"Yes, indeed. I can't tell you how surprised I was, Mr. Snowdon. And there seems to be such a mystery about it, too."

Bessie positively glowed with delight in such confidential talk. It was her dread that

Jane's arrival might put an end to it before everything was revealed.

"A mystery, you may well say, Mrs. Byass. I think highly of Mr. Kirkwood, very highly ; but really in this affair ! It's almost too painful to talk about—to *you*."

Bessie blushed, as becomes the English-woman of mature years when she is gracefully supposed to be ignorant of all it most behoves her to know.

"Well, well ; he is on the point of marrying a young person with whom I should certainly not like my daughter to associate,—fortunately there is little chance of that. You were never acquainted with Miss Hewett ?"

"Ye—yes. A long time ago."

"Well, well ; we must be charitable. You know that she is dreadfully disfigured ?"

"Disfigured ? Jane didn't say a word about that. She only told me that Mr. Kirkwood was going to marry her, and I didn't like to ask too many questions. I hadn't even heard as she was at home."

Joseph related to her the whole story, whilst Bessie fidgeted with satisfaction.

"I thought," he added, "that you could

perhaps throw some light on the mystery. We can only suppose that Kirkwood has acted from the highest motives, but I really think—well, well, we won't talk of it any more. I was led to this subject from speaking of this poor girl's position. I wonder whether it will be possible for her to continue to live in your friendly care, Mrs. Byass?"

"Oh, I shall be only too glad, Mr. Snowdon!"

"Now how kind that is of you! Of course she wouldn't want more than two rooms."

"Of course not."

Joseph was going further into details, when a latch-key was heard opening the front-door. Jane entered hurriedly. The rapid walk had brought colour to her cheek; in her simple mourning attire she looked very interesting, very sweet and girlish. She had been shedding tears, and it was with unsteady voice that she excused herself for keeping her father waiting.

"Never mind that, my dear," replied Joseph, as he kissed her cheek. "You have been doing good—unselfish as always. Sit down and rest; you must be careful not to over-exert yourself."

Bessie busied herself affectionately in removing Jane's hat and jacket, then withdrew that father and child might converse in private. Joseph looked at his daughter. His praise of her was not all mere affectation of sentiment. He had spoken truly when he said to Scawthorne that, but for Clem, he would ask nothing better than to settle down with this gentle girl for his companion. Selfishness, for the most part, but implying appreciation of her qualities. She did not love him, but he was sincere enough with himself to admit that this was perfectly natural. Had circumstances permitted, he would have tried hard to win some affection from her. Poor little girl! How would it affect her when she heard what he was going to say? He felt angry with Kirkwood; yes, truly indignant,—men are capable of greater inconsistencies than this. She would not have cared much about the money had Kirkwood married her; of that he felt sure. She had lost her lover; now he was going to deprive her of her inheritance. Cruel! Yes; but he really felt so well-disposed to her, so determined to make her a comfortable provision for the future; and had the

money been hers, impossible to have regarded her thus. Joseph was thankful to the chance which, in making him wealthy, had also enabled him to nourish such virtuous feeling.

How should he begin? He had a bright idea, an idea worthy of him. Thrusting his hand into his pocket, he brought out half-a-crown. Then :

“Your humble friend’s in a sad condition, I’m afraid, Jane?”

“She is, father.”

“Suppose you give her this! Every little helps, you know.”

Jane received the coin and murmured thanks for his kindness, but could not help betraying some surprise. Joseph was on the watch for this. It gave him his exquisite opportunity.

“You’re surprised at me offering you money, Jane? I believe your poor grandfather led you to suppose that—that his will was made almost entirely in your favour?”

Jane could not reply; she searched his face.

“Would it disappoint you very much, my child,” he continued, sympathetically, “if it turned out that he had either altered his mind

or by some accident had neglected to make his will? I speak as your father, Janey, and I think I have some knowledge of your character. I think I know that you are as free from avarice as any one could be."

Was it true? he began to ask himself. Why, then, had her countenance fallen? Why did such a look of deep distress pass over it?

"The fact is, Janey," he continued, hardening himself a little as he noted her expression, "your grandfather left no will. The result—the legal result—of that is, that all his property becomes—ah—mine. He—in fact he destroyed his will a very short time, comparatively speaking, before he died, and he neglected to make another. Unfortunately, you see, under these circumstances we can't be sure what his wish was."

She was deadly pale; there was anguish in the look with which she regarded her father.

"I'm very sorry it pains you so, my dear," Joseph remarked, still more coldly. "I didn't think you were so taken up with the thought of money. Really, Jane, a young girl at your time of life"—

"Father, father, how can you think that?

It wasn't to be for myself; I thought you knew; indeed you did know!"

"But you looked so very strange, my dear. Evidently you felt"——

"Yes—I feel it—I do feel it! But because it means that grandfather couldn't get back his trust in me. Oh, it is too hard! When did he destroy his will? When, father?"

"Ten days before his death."

"Yes; that was when it happened. You never heard; he promised to tell nobody. I disappointed him. I showed myself very foolish and weak in—in something that happened then. I made grandfather think that I was too selfish to live as he hoped,—that I couldn't do what I'd undertaken. That was why he destroyed his will. And I thought he had forgiven me! I thought he trusted me again! O grandfather!"

Snowdon was astonished at the explanation of his own good luck, and yet more at Jane's display of feeling. So quiet, so reserved as he had always known her, she seemed to have become another person. For some moments he could only gaze at her in wonder. Never yet had he heard, never again would he hear,

the utterance of an emotion so profound and so noble.

“Jane,—try and control yourself, my dear. Let’s talk it over, Jane.”

“I feel as if it would break my heart. I thought I had that one thing to comfort me. It’s like losing him again—losing his confidence. To think I should have disappointed him in just what he hoped more than anything!”

“But you’re mistaken,” Joseph exclaimed, a generous feeling for once getting the better of prudence. “Listen, my dear, and I’ll explain to you. I hadn’t finished when you interrupted me.”

She clasped her hands upon her lap and gazed at him in eager appeal.

“Did he say anything to you, father?”

“No,—and you may be quite sure that if he *hadn’t* trusted you, he *would* have said something. What’s more, on the very day before his death he wrote a letter to Mr. Percival, to say that he wanted to make his will again. He was going to do it on the Monday,—there now! It was only an accident; he hadn’t time to do what he wished.”

This was making a concession which he had expressly resolved to guard against; but Joseph's designs ripened, lost their crudity, as he saw more and more of his daughter's disposition. He was again grateful to her; she had made things smoother than he could have hoped.

"You really think, father, that he would have made the same will as before?"

"Not a doubt about it, my love; not a doubt of it. In fact—now let me set your poor little mind at rest—only two days before his death—when was it I saw him last? Friday? Thursday?—he said to me that he had a higher opinion of you than ever. There now, Jane!"

She would have deemed it impossible for any one to utter less than truth in such connection as this. Her eyes gleamed with joy.

"Now you understand just how it was, Jane. What we have to talk about now is, how we can arrange things so as to carry out your grandfather's wish. I am your guardian, my dear. Now I'm sure you wouldn't desire to have command of large sums of money before you are twenty-one? Just so; your grand-

father didn't intend it. Well, first let me ask you this question. Would you rather live with—with your stepmother, or with your excellent friend Mrs. Byass? I see what your answer is, and I approve it; I fully approve it. Now suppose we arrange that you are to have an allowance of two pounds a week? It is just possible—just possible—that I may have to go abroad on business before long; in that case the payment would be made to you through an agent. Do you feel it would be satisfactory?"

Jane was thinking how much of this sum could be saved to give away.

"It seems little? But you see"——

"No, no, father. It is quite enough."

"Good. We understand each other. Of course this is a temporary arrangement. I must have time to think over grandfather's ideas. Why, you are a mere child yet, Janey. Seventeen! A mere child, my dear!"

Forgetting the decorum imposed by his costume, Joseph became all but gay, so delightfully were things arranging themselves. A hundred a year he could very well afford just to keep his conscience at ease; and for Jane

it would be wealth. Excellent Mrs. Byass was as good a guardian as could anywhere be found, and Jane's discretion forbade any fear on her account when—business should take him away.

“ Well now, we've talked quite long enough. Don't think for a moment that you hadn't your grandfather's confidence, my dear ; it would be distressing yourself wholly without reason—wholly. Be a good girl—why, there you see ; I speak to you as if you were a child. And so you are, poor little girl !—far too young to have worldly troubles. No, no ; I must relieve you of all that, until——. Well now, I'll leave you for to-day. Good-bye, my dear.”

He kissed her cheek, but Jane, sobbing a little, put her pure lips to his. Joseph looked about him for an instant as if he had forgotten something, then departed with what seemed unnecessary haste.

Jane and Mrs. Byass had a long talk before dinner-time. Mystery was at an end between them now ; they talked much of the past, more of the future.

At two o'clock Jane received a visit from Miss Lant. This lady was already apprised by her friend Mr. Percival of all that had come

to pass ; she was prepared to exercise much discretion, but Jane soon showed her that this was needless. The subject of pressing importance to the latter was Pennyloaf's disastrous circumstances ; unable to do all she wished, Jane was much relieved when her charitable friend proposed to set off to Merlin Place forthwith and ascertain how help could most effectually be given. Yes ; it was good to be constrained to think of another's sorrows.

There passed a fortnight, during which Jane spent some hours each day with Pennyloaf. By the kindness of fate only one of Bob's children survived him, but it was just this luckless infant whose existence made Pennyloaf's position so difficult. Alone, she could have gone back to her slop-work, or some less miserable slavery might have been discovered ; but Pennyloaf dreaded leaving her child each day in the care of strangers, being only too well aware what that meant. Mrs. Candy was, of course, worse than useless ; Stephen the potman had more than his work set in looking after her. Whilst Miss Lant and Jane were straining their wits on the hardest of all problems—to find a means of livelihood for one

whom society pronounced utterly superfluous, Pennyloaf most unexpectedly solved the question by her own effort. Somewhere near the Meat Market, one night, she encountered an acquaintance, a woman of not much more than her own age, who had recently become a widow, and was supporting herself (as well as four little ones) by keeping a stall at which she sold second-hand children's clothing; her difficulty was to dispose of her children whilst she was doing business at night. Pennyloaf explained her own position, and with the result that her acquaintance, by name Mrs. Todd, proposed a partnership. Why shouldn't they share a room, work together with the needle in patching and making, and by Pennyloaf's staying at home each evening keep the tribe of youngsters out of danger? This project was carried out; the two brought their furniture together into a garret, and it seemed probable that they would succeed in keeping themselves alive.

But before this settlement was effected Jane's own prospects had undergone a change of some importance. For a fortnight nothing was heard of Joseph Snowdon in Hanover

Street; then there came a letter from him; it bore a Liverpool post-mark, but was headed with no address. Joseph wrote that the business to which he had alluded was already summoning him from England; he regretted that there had not even been time for him to say farewell to his daughter. However, he would write to her occasionally during his absence, and hoped to hear from her. The allowance of two pounds a week would be duly paid by an agent, and on receiving it each Saturday she was to forward an acknowledgment to "Mr. H. Jones," at certain reading-rooms in the City. Let her in the meantime be a good girl, remain with her excellent friend Mrs. Byass, and repose absolute confidence in her affectionate father—J. S.

That same morning there came also a letter from Liverpool to Mrs. Joseph Snowdon, a letter which ran thus:

"Clem, old girl, I regret very much that affairs of pressing importance call me away from my happy home. It is especially distressing that this occurs just at the time when we

were on the point of taking our house, in which we hoped to spend the rest of our lives in bliss. Alas, that is not to be! Do not repine, and do not break the furniture in the lodgings, as your means will henceforth be limited, I fear. You will remember that I was in your debt, with reference to a little affair which happened in Clerkenwell Close, not such a long time ago; please accept this intimation as payment in full. When I am established in the country to which business summons me, I shall of course send for you immediately, but it may happen that some little time will intervene before I am able to take that delightful step. In the meanwhile your mother will supply you with all the money you need; she has full authority from me to do so. All blessings upon you, and may you be happy.—With tears I sign myself,

“YOUR BROKEN-HEARTED HUSBAND.”

Joseph's absence through the night had all but prepared Clem for something of this kind, yet he had managed things so well that up to the time of his departure she had not been able to remark a single suspicious circumstance

unless, indeed, it were the joyous affectionateness with which he continued to behave. She herself had been passing through a time of excitement and even of suffering. When she learned from the newspaper what fate had befallen Bob Hewett, it was as though some one had dealt her a half-stunning blow ; in her fierce animal way she was attached to Bob, and for the first time in her life she knew a genuine grief. The event seemed at first impossible ; she sped hither and thither, making inquiries, and raged in her heart against every one who confirmed the newspaper report. Combined with the pain of loss was her disappointment at the frustration of the scheme Bob had undertaken in concert with her. Brooding on her deadly purpose, she had come to regard it as a certain thing that before long her husband would be killed. The details were arranged ; all her cunning had gone to the contrivance of a plot for disguising the facts of his murder. Savagely she had exulted in the prospect, not only of getting rid of him, but of being revenged for her old humiliation. A thousand times she imagined herself in Bob's lurking-place, raising the weapon, strik-

ing the murderous blow, rifling the man's pockets to mislead those who found his body, and had laughed to herself triumphantly. Joseph out of the way, the next thing was to remove Pennyloaf. Oh, that would easily have been contrived. Then she and Bob would have been married.

Very long since Clem had shed tears, but she did so this day when there was no longer a possibility of doubting that Bob was dead. She shut herself in her room and moaned like a wild beast in pain. Joseph could not but observe, when he came home, that she was suffering in some extraordinary way. When he spoke jestingly about it, she all but rushed upon him with her fists. And in the same moment she determined that he should not escape, even if she had to murder him with her own hands. From that day her constant occupation was searching the newspapers to get hints about poisons. Doubtless it was as well for Joseph to be speedy in his preparations for departure.

She was present in the police-court when Jack Bartley came forward to be dealt with. Against him she stored up hatred and the

resolve of vengeance ; if it were years before she had the opportunity, Jack should in the end pay for what he had done.

And now Joseph had played her the trick she anticipated ; he had saved himself out of her clutches, and had carried off all his money with him. She knew well enough what was meant by his saying that her mother would supply what she needed ; very likely that he had made any such arrangement ! You should have heard the sterling vernacular in which Clem gave utterance to her feelings as soon as she had deciphered the mocking letter !

Without a minute's delay she dressed and left the house. Having a few shillings in her pocket, she took a cab at King's Cross and bade the driver drive his hardest to Clerkenwell Close. Up Pentonville Hill panted the bony horse, Clem swearing all the time because it could go no quicker. But the top was reached ; she shouted to the man to whip, whip ! By the time they pulled up at Mrs. Peckover's house Clem herself perspired as profusely as the animal.

Mrs. Peckover was at breakfast, alone.

" Read that, will you ? Read that ! " roared

Clem, rushing upon her and dashing the letter in her face.

“Why, you mad cat!” cried her mother, starting up in anger. “What’s wrong with you now?”

“Read that there letter! That’s *your* doin’, that is! Read it! Read it!”

Half-frightened, Mrs. Peckover drew away from the table and managed to peruse Joseph’s writing. Having come to the end, she burst into jeering laughter.

“He’s done it, has he? He’s took his ’ook, has he? *What* did I tell you? Don’t swear at me, or I’ll give you something to swear about—such languidge in a respectable ’ouse! Ha, ha! What did I tell you? You wouldn’t take *my* way. Oh no, you must go off and be independent. *Serve* you right! Ha, ha! *Serve* you right! You’ll get no pity from me.”

“You ’old your jaw, mother, or I’ll precious soon set my marks on your ugly old face! What does he say there about you? You’re to pay me money. He’s made arrangements with you. Don’t try to cheat me, or I’ll—soon have a summons out against you. The

letter's proof; it's lawyer's proof. You try to cheat me and see."

Clem had sufficient command of her faculties to devise this line of action. She half believed, too, that the letter would be of some legal efficacy, as against her mother.

"You bloomin' fool!" screamed Mrs. Peck-over. "Do you think I was born yesterday? Not one farden do you get out of me if you starve in the street—not one farden! It's my turn now. I've had about enough o' your cheek an' your hinsults. You'll go and work for your livin', you great cart-horse!"

"Work! No fear! I'll set the perlice after him."

"The perlice! What can they do?"

"Is it law as he can go off and leave me with nothing to live on?"

"Course it is! Unless you go to the work'us an' throw yourself on the parish. Do, do! Oh my! shouldn't I like to see you brought down to the work'us, like Mrs. Igginbottom, the wife of the cat's-meat man, him as they stuck up wanted for desertion!"

"You're a liar!" Clem shouted. "I can make *you* support me before it comes to that."

The wrangle continued for some time longer ; then Clem bethought herself of another person with whom she must have the satisfaction of speaking her mind. On the impulse, she rushed away, out of Clerkenwell Close, up St. John Street Road, across City Road, down to Hanover Street, literally running for most of the time. Her knock at Mrs. Byass's door was terrific.

"I want to see Jane Snowdon," was her address to Bessie.

"Do you? I think you might have knocked more like civilisation," replied Mrs. Byass, proud of expressing herself with superior refinement.

But Clem pushed her way forward. Jane, alarmed at the noise, showed herself on the stairs.

"You just come 'ere!" cried Clem to her. "I've got something to say to *you*, Miss!"

Jane was of a sudden possessed with terror, the old terror with which Clem had inspired her years ago. She shrank back, but Bessie Byass was by no means disposed to allow this kind of thing to go on in her house.

"Mrs. Snowdon," she exclaimed, "I don't

know what your business may be, but if you can't behave yourself, you'll please to go away a bit quicker than you came. The idea! Did any one ever hear!"

"I shan't go till I choose," replied Clem, "and that won't be till I've had my say with that little ——! Where's your father, Jane Snowdon? You just tell me that."

"My father," faltered Jane, in the silence. "I haven't seen him for a fortnight."

"You haven't, eh? Little liar! It's what I used to call you when you scrubbed our kitchen floor, and it's what I call you now. D'you remember when you did the 'ouse-work, 'an slept under the kitchen table? D'you remember, eh? Haven't seen him for a fortnight, ain't you? Oh, he's a nice man, is your father! He ran away an' deserted your mother. But he's done it once too often. I'll precious soon have the perlice after him! Has he left you to look after yourself? Has he, eh? You just tell me that!"

Jane and Mrs. Byass stared at each other in dismay. The letter that had come this morning enabled them to guess the meaning of Clem's fury. The latter interpreted their

looks as an admission that Jane too was a victim. She laughed aloud.

“How does it taste, little liar, eh? A second disappointment! You thought you was a-goin’ to have all the money; now you’ve got none, and you may go back to Whitehead’s. They’ll be glad to see you, will Whitehead’s. Oh, he’s a nice man, your father! Would you like to know what’s been goin’ on ever since he found out your old grandfather? Would you like to know how he put himself out to prevent you an’ that Kirkwood feller gettin’ married, just so that the money mightn’t get into other people’s ’ands? Would you like to know how my beast of a mother and him put their ’eds together to see how they could get hold of the bloomin’ money? An’ *you* thought you was sure of it, didn’t you? Will you come with me to the perlice-station, just to help to describe what he looks like? An affectionate father, ain’t he? Almost as good as he is a ’usband. You just listen to me, Jane Snowdon. If I find out as you’re havin’ money from him, I’ll be revenged on you, mind that! I’ll be revenged on you! D’you remember what my hand feels

like? You've had it on the side of your —— 'ed often enough. You just look out for yourself!"

"And you just turn out of my house," cried Bessie, scarlet with wrath. "This minute! Sarah! Sarah! Run out by the arey-steps and fetch a p'liceman, this minute! The idea!"

Clem had said her say, however, and with a few more volleys of atrocious language was content to retire. Having slammed the door upon her, Bessie cried in a trembling voice:

"Oh, if only Sam had been here! My, how I should have liked Sam to have been here! *Wouldn't* he have given her something for herself! Why, such a creature oughtn't be left loose. Oh, if Sam had been here!"

Jane had sat down on the stairs; her face was hidden in her hands. That brutal voice had carried her back to her wretched childhood; everything about her in the present was unreal in comparison with the terrors, the hardships, the humiliations revived by memory. As she sat at this moment, so had she sat many a time on the cellar-steps at Mrs. Peckover's. So powerfully was her imagination affected that she had a feeling as

if her hands were grimy from toil, as if her limbs ached. Oh that dreadful voice! Was she never, never to escape beyond hearing of it?

“Jane, my dear, come into the sitting-room,” said Bessie. “No wonder it’s upset you. What *can* it all mean?”

The meaning was not far to seek; Jane understood everything,—yes, even her father’s hypocrisies. She listened for a few minutes to her friend’s indignant exclamations, then looked up, her resolve taken.

“Mrs. Byass, I shall take no more money. I shall go to work again and earn my living. How thankful I am that I can!”

“Why, what nonsense are you talking, child! Just because that—that *creature*—— Why, I’ve no patience with you, Jane! As if she durst touch you! Touch you? I’d like to see her indeed.”

“It isn’t that, Mrs. Byass. I can’t take money from father. I haven’t felt easy in my mind ever since he told me about it, and now I *can’t* take the money. Whether it’s true or not, all she said, I should never have a night’s rest if I consented to live in this way.”

“ Oh, you *don't* really mean it, Jane ? ”

Bessie all but sobbed with vexation.

“ I mean it, and I shall never alter my mind. I shall send back the money, and write to the man that he needn't send any more. However often it comes, I shall always return it. I couldn't, I couldn't live on that money ! Never ask me to, Mrs. Byass.”

Practical Bessie had already begun to ask herself what arrangement Jane proposed to make about lodgings. She was no Mrs. Peck-over, but neither did circumstances allow her to disregard the question of rent. It cut her to the heart to think of refusing an income of two pounds per week.

Jane too saw all the requirements of the case.

“ Mrs. Byass, will you let me have one room,—my old room upstairs ? I have been very happy there, and I should like to stay if I can. You know what I can earn ; can you afford to let me live there ? I'd do my utmost to help you in the house ; I'll be as good as a servant, if you can't keep Sarah. I should so like to stay with you ! ”

“ You just let me hear you talk about leav-

ing, that's all ! Wait till I've talked it over with Sam."

Jane went upstairs, and for the rest of the day the house was very quiet.

Not Whitehead's ; there were other places where work might be found. And before many days she had found it. Happily there were no luxuries to be laid aside ; her ordinary dress was not too good for the workroom. She had no habits of idleness to overcome, and an hour at the table made her as expert with her fingers as ever.

Returning from the first day's work, she sat in her room—the little room which used to be hers—to rest and think for a moment before going down to Bessie's supper-table. And her thought was :

" He too is just coming home from work. Why should my life be easier than his ? "

CHAPTER XII.

SIDNEY.

Look at a map of greater London, a map on which the town proper shows as a dark, irregularly rounded patch against the whiteness of suburban districts, and just on the northern limit of the vast network of streets you will distinguish the name of Crouch End. Another decade, and the dark patch will have spread greatly further ; for the present, Crouch End is still able to remind one that it was in the country a very short time ago. The streets have a smell of newness, of dampness ; the bricks retain their complexion, the stucco has not rotted more than one expects in a year or two ; poverty tries to hide itself with venetian blinds, until the time when an advanced guard of houses shall justify the existence of the slum.

Characteristic of the locality is a certain row of one-storey cottages,—villas, the adver-

tiser calls them,—built of white brick, each with one bay window on the ground floor, a window pretentiously fashioned and desiring to be taken for stone, though obviously made of bad plaster. Before each house is a garden, measuring six feet by three, entered by a little iron gate, which grinds as you push it, and at no time would latch. The front-door also grinds on the sill; it can only be opened by force, and quivers in a way that shows how unsubstantially it is made. As you set foot in the pinched passage, the sound of your tread proves the whole fabric a thing of lath and sand. The ceilings, the walls, confess themselves neither water-tight nor air-tight. Whatever you touch is at once found to be sham.

In the kitchen of one of these houses, at two o'clock on a Saturday afternoon in September, three young people were sitting down to the dinner-table: a girl of nearly fourteen, her sister, a year younger, and their brother, not yet eleven. All were decently dressed, but very poorly; a glance at them, and you knew that in this house there was little money to spend on superfluities. The same impression

was produced by the appointments of the kitchen, which was disorderly, too, and spoke neglect of the scrubbing-brush. As for the table, it was ill laid and worse supplied. The meal was to consist of the fag-end of a shoulder of mutton, some villainously cooked potatoes (*à l'Anglaise*) and bread.

“Oh, I can’t eat this rot again!” cried the boy, making a dig with his fork at the scarcely clad piece of bone. “I shall have bread and cheese. Lug the cheese out, Annie!”

“No, you won’t,” replied the elder girl, in a disagreeable voice. “You’ll eat this or go without.”

She had an unpleasing appearance. Her face was very thin, her lips pinched sourly together, her eyes furtive, hungry, malevolent. Her movements were awkward and impatient, and a morbid nervousness kept her constantly starting, with a stealthy look here or there.

“I shall have the cheese if I like!” shouted the boy, a very ill-conditioned youngster, whose face seemed to have been damaged in recent conflict. His clothes were dusty, and his hair stood up like stubble.

“Hold your row, Tom,” said the younger

girl, who was quiet, and had the look of an invalid. "It's always you begins. Besides, you can't have cheese; there's only a little bit, and Sidney said he was going to make his dinner of it to-day."

"Of course,—selfish beast!"

"Selfish! Now just listen to that, Amy! when he said it just that we mightn't be afraid to finish the meat."

Amy said nothing, but began to hack fragments off the bone.

"Put some aside for father first," continued Annie, holding a plate.

"Father be blowed!" cried Tom. "You just give me that first cut. Give it here, Annie, or I'll crack you on the head!"

As he struggled for the plate, Amy bent forward and hit his arm violently with the handle of the knife. This was the signal for a general scrimmage, in the midst of which Tom caught up a hearth-brush and flung it at Amy's head. The missile went wide of its mark and shattered one of the window-panes.

"There now!" exclaimed Annie, who had begun to cry in consequence of a blow from Tom's fist. "See what father says to that!"

"If I was him," said Amy, in a low voice of passion, "I'd tie you to something and beat you till you lost your senses. Ugly brute!"

The warfare would not have ended here but that the door opened and he of whom they spoke made his appearance.

In the past two years and a half John Hewett had become a shaky old man. Of his grizzled hair very little remained, and little of his beard; his features were shrunken, his neck scraggy; he stooped much, and there was a senile indecision in his movements. He wore rough, patched clothing, had no collar, and seemed, from the state of his hands, to have been engaged in very dirty work. As he entered and came upon the riotous group his eyes lit up with anger. In a strained voice he shouted a command of silence.

"It's all that 'Tom, father,'" piped Annie. "There's no living with him."

John's eye fell on the broken window.

"Which of you's done that?" he asked sternly, pointing to it.

No one spoke.

"Who's goin' to pay for it, I'd like to know? Doesn't it cost enough to keep you,

but you must go makin' extra expense? Where's the money to come from, I want to know, if you go on like this?"

He turned suddenly upon the elder girl.

"I've got something to say to you, Miss. Why wasn't you at work this morning?"

Amy avoided his look. Her pale face became mottled with alarm, but only for an instant; then she hardened herself and moved her head insolently.

"Why wasn't you at work? Where's your week's money?"

"I haven't got any."

"You haven't got any? Why not?"

For a while she was stubbornly silent, but Hewett constrained her to confession at length. On his way home to-day he had been informed by an acquaintance that Amy was wandering about the streets at an hour when she ought to have been at her employment. Unable to put off the evil moment any longer, the girl admitted that four days ago she was dismissed for bad behaviour, and that since then she had pretended to go to work as usual. The trifling sum paid to her on dismissal she had spent.

John turned to his youngest daughter and asked in a hollow voice :

“Where’s Clara?”

“She’s got one of her headaches, father,” replied the girl, trembling.

He turned and went from the room.

It was long since he had lost his place of porter at the filter-works. Before leaving England, Joseph Snowdon managed to dispose of his interest in the firm of Lake, Snowdon, & Co., and at the same time Hewett was informed that his wages would be reduced by five shillings a week,—the sum which had been supplied by Michael Snowdon’s benevolence. It was a serious loss. Clara’s marriage removed one grave anxiety, but the three children had still to be brought up, and with every year John’s chance of steady employment would grow less. Sidney Kirkwood declared himself able and willing to help substantially, but he might before long have children of his own to think of, and in any case it was shameful to burden him in this way.

Shameful or not, it very soon came to pass that Sidney had the whole family on his hands.

A bad attack of rheumatism in the succeeding winter made John incapable of earning anything at all; for two months he was a cripple. Till then Sidney and his wife had occupied lodgings in Holloway; when it became evident that Hewett must not hope to be able to support his children, and when Sidney had for many weeks paid the rent (as well as supplying the money to live upon) in Farringdon Road Buildings, the house at Crouch End was taken, and there all went to live together. Clara's health was very uncertain, and though at first she spoke frequently of finding work to do at home, the birth of a child put an end to such projects. Amy Hewett was shortly at the point when the education of a board-school child is said to be "finished;" by good luck, employment was found for her in Kentish Town, with three shillings a week from the first. John could not resign himself to being a mere burden on the home. Enforced idleness so fretted him that at times he seemed all but out of his wits. In despair he caught at the strangest kinds of casual occupation; when earning nothing, he would barely eat enough to keep himself alive, and if he succeeded in bringing

home a shilling or two, he turned the money about in his hands with a sort of angry joy that it would have made your heart ache to witness. Just at present he had a job of cleaning and whitewashing some cellars in Stoke Newington.

He was absent from the kitchen for five minutes, during which time the three sat round the table. Amy pretended to eat unconcernedly; Tom made grimaces at her. As for Annie, she cried. Their father entered the room again.

"Why didn't you tell us about this at once?" he asked, in a shaking voice, looking at his daughter with eyes of blank misery.

"I don't know."

"You're a bad, selfish girl!" he broke out, again overcome with anger. "Haven't you got neither sense nor feelin' nor honesty? Just when you ought to have begun to earn a bit higher wages,—when you ought to have been glad to work your hardest, to show you wasn't unthankful to them as has done so much for you! Who earned money to keep you when you was goin' to school? Who fed and clothed you, and saw as you didn't want

for nothing? Who is it as you owe everything to?—just tell me that.”

Amy affected to pay no attention. She kept swallowing morsels, with ugly movements of her lips and jaws.

“How often have I to tell you all that if it wasn’t for Sidney Kirkwood you’d have been workhouse children? As sure as you’re livin’, you’d all of you have gone to the workhouse! And you go on just as if you didn’t owe thanks to nobody. I tell you it’ll be years and years before one of you’ll have a penny you can call your own. If it was Annie or Tom behaved so careless, there’d be less wonder; but for a girl of your age—I’m ashamed as you belong to me! You can’t even keep your tongue from bein’ impudent to Clara, her as you ain’t worthy to be a servant to!”

“Clara’s a sneak,” observed Tom, with much coolness. “She’s always telling lies about us.”

“I’ll half-knock your young head off your shoulders,” cried his father, furiously, “if you talk to me like that! Not one of you’s fit to live in the same house with her.”

“Father, I haven’t done nothing,” whimpered

Annie, hurt by being thus included in his reprobation.

“No more you have—not just now, but you’re often enough more trouble to your sister than you need be. But it’s you I’m talkin’ to, Amy. You dare to leave this house again till there’s another place found for you! If you’d any self-respect, you couldn’t bear to look Sidney in the face. Suppose you hadn’t such a brother to work for you, what would you do, eh? Who’d buy your food? Who’d pay the rent of the house you live in?”

A noteworthy difference between children of this standing and such as pass their years of play-time in homes unshadowed by poverty. For these, life had no illusions. Of every mouthful that they ate, the price was known to them. The roof over their heads was there by no grace of Providence, but solely because such-and-such a sum was paid weekly in hard cash, when the collector came; let the payment fail, and they knew perfectly well what the result would be. The children of the upper world could not even by chance give a thought to the sources whence their needs are

supplied; speech on such a subject in their presence would be held indecent. In John Hewett's position, the indecency, the crime, would have been to keep silence and pretend that the needs of existence are ministered to as a matter of course.

His tone and language were pitifully those of feeble age. The emotion proved too great a strain upon his body, and he had at length to sit down in a tremulous state, miserable with the consciousness of failing authority. He would have made but a poor figure now upon Clerkenwell Green. Even as his frame was shrunken, so had the circle of his interests contracted; he could no longer speak or think on the subjects which had fired him through the better part of his life; if he was driven to try and utter himself on the broad questions of social wrong, of the people's cause, a senile stammering of incoherencies was the only result. The fight had ever gone against John Hewett; he was one of those who are born to be defeated. His failing energies spent themselves in conflict with his own children; the concerns of a miserable home were all his mind could now cope with.

“Come and sit down to your dinner, father,” Annie said, when he became silent.

“Dinner? I want no dinner. I’ve no stomach for food when it’s stolen. What’s Sidney goin’ to have when he comes home?”

“He said he’d do with bread and cheese to-day. See, we’ve cut some meat for you?”

“You keep that for Sidney, then, and don’t one of you dare to say anything about it. Cut me a bit of bread, Annie.”

She did so. He ate it, standing by the fireplace, drank a glass of water, and went into the sitting-room. There he sat unoccupied for nearly an hour, his head at times dropping forward as if he were nearly asleep; but it was only in abstraction. The morning’s work had wearied him excessively, as such effort always did, but the mental misery he was suffering made him unconscious of bodily fatigue.

The clinking and grinding of the gate drew his attention; he stood up and saw his son-in-law, returned from Clerkenwell. When he had heard the house-door grind and shake and close, he called “Sidney!”

Sidney looked into the parlour, with a smile.

“Come in here a minute; I want to speak to you.”

It was a face that told of many troubles. Sidney might resolutely keep a bright countenance, but there was no hiding the sallowness of his cheeks and the lines drawn by ever-wakeful anxiety. The effect of a struggle with mean necessities is seldom anything but degradation, in look and in character; but Sidney's temper, and the conditions of his life, preserved him against that danger. His features, worn into thinness, seemed to present more distinctly than ever their points of refinement. You saw that he was habitually a grave and silent man; all the more attractive his aspect when, as now, he seemed to rest from thought and give expression to his natural kindliness. In the matter of attire he was no longer as careful as he used to be; the clothes he wore had done more than just service, and hung about him unregarded.

“Clara upstairs?” he asked, when he had noticed Hewett's look.

“Yes; she's lying down. May's been troublesome all the morning. But it was something else I meant.”

And John began to speak of Amy's ill-doing. He had always in some degree a sense of shame when he spoke privately with Sidney, always felt painfully the injustice involved in their relations. At present he could not look Kirkwood in the face, and his tone was that of a man who abases himself to make confession of guilt.

Sidney was gravely concerned. It was his habit to deal with the children's faults good-naturedly, to urge John not to take a sombre view of their thoughtlessness; but the present instance could not be made light of. Secretly he had always expected that the girl would be a source of more serious trouble the older she grew. He sat in silence, leaning forward, his eyes bent down.

"It's no good whatever *I* say," lamented Hewett. "They don't heed me. Why must I have children like these? Haven't I always done my best to teach them to be honest and good-hearted? If I'd spent my life in the worst ways a man can, they couldn't have turned out more worthless. Haven't I wished always what was right and good and true? Haven't I always spoke up for justice in the

world? Haven't I done what I could, Sidney, to be helpful to them as fell into misfortune? And now in my old age I'm only a burden, and the children as come after me are nothing but a misery to all as have to do with them. If it wasn't for Clara I feel I couldn't live my time out. She's the one that pays me back for the love I've given her. All the others,—I can't feel as they're children of mine at all."

It was a strange and touching thing that he seemed now-a-days utterly to have forgotten Clara's past. Invariably he spoke of her as if she had at all times been his stay and comfort. The name of his son who was dead never passed his lips, but of Clara he could not speak too long or too tenderly.

"I can't think what to do," Sidney said. "If I talk to her in a fault-finding way, she'll only dislike me the more; she feels I've no business to interfere."

"You're too soft with them. You spoil them. Why, there's one of them broken a pane in the kitchen to-day, and they know you'll take it quiet, like you do everything else."

Sidney wrinkled his brow. These petty expenses, ever repeated, were just what made

the difficulty in his budget ; he winced whenever such demands encroached upon the poor weekly income of which every penny was too little for the serious needs of the family. Feeling that if he sat and thought much longer a dark mood would seize upon him, he rose hastily.

“I shall try kindness with her. Don’t say anything more in her hearing.”

He went to the kitchen-door, and cried cheerfully, “My dinner ready, girls?”

Annie’s voice replied with a timorous affirmative.

“All right ; I’ll be down in a minute.”

Treading as gently as possible, he ascended the stairs and entered his bedroom. The blind was drawn down, but sunlight shone through it and made a softened glow in the chamber. In a little cot was sitting his child, May, rather more than a year old ; she had toys about her, and was for the moment contented. Clara lay on the bed, her face turned so that Sidney could not see it. He spoke to her, and she just moved her arm, but gave no reply.

“Do you wish to be left alone?” he asked, in a subdued and troubled voice.

“ Yes.”

“ Shall I take May downstairs ? ”

“ If you like. Don’t speak to me now.”

He remained standing by the bed for a minute, then turned his eyes on the child, who smiled at him. He could not smile in return, but went quietly away.

“ It’s one of her bad days,” whispered Hewett, who met him at the foot of the stairs.

“ She can’t help it, poor girl ! ”

“ No, no.”

Sidney ate what was put before him without giving a thought to it. When his eyes wandered round the kitchen the disorder and dirt worried him, but on that subject he could not speak. His hunger appeased, he looked steadily at Amy, and said in a kindly tone :

“ Father tells me you’ve had a stroke of bad luck, Amy. We must have a try at another place, mustn’t we ? Hollo, there’s a window broken ! Has Tom been playing at cricket in the room, eh ? ”

The girls kept silence.

“ Come and let’s make out the list for our shopping this afternoon,” he continued. “ I’m

afraid there'll have to be something the less for that window, girls; what do *you* say?"

"We'll do without a pudding to-morrow, Sidney," suggested Annie.

"Oh come, now! I'm fond of pudding."

Thus it was always; if he could not direct by kindness, he would never try to rule by harsh words. Six years ago it was not so easy for him to be gentle under provocation, and he would then have made a better disciplinarian in such a home as this. On Amy and Tom all his rare goodness was thrown away. Never mind; shall one go over to the side of evil because one despairs of vanquishing it?

The budget, the budget! Always so many things perforce cut out; always such cruel pressure of things that *could* not be cut out. In the early days of his marriage he had accustomed himself to a liberality of expenditure out of proportion to his income; the little store of savings allowed him to indulge his kindness to Clara and her relatives, and he kept putting off to the future that strict revision of outlay which his position of course demanded. The day when he had no longer a choice came all too soon; with alarm he discovered that his

savings had melted away ; the few sovereigns remaining must be sternly guarded for the hour of stern necessity. How it ground on his sensibilities when he was compelled to refuse some request from Clara or the girls ! His generous nature suffered pangs of self-contempt as often as there was talk of economy. To-day, for instance, whilst he was worrying in thought over Amy's behaviour, and at the same time trying to cut down the Saturday's purchases in order to pay for the broken window, up comes Tom with the announcement that he lost his hat this morning, and had to return bareheaded. Another unforeseen expense ! And Sidney was angry with himself for his impulse of anger against the boy.

Clara never went out to make purchases, seldom indeed left the house for any reason, unless Sidney persuaded her to walk a short distance with him after sundown, when she veiled herself closely. Neither Amy nor Annie could be trusted to do all the shopping, so that Sidney generally accompanied one or other of them for that purpose on Saturday afternoon. To-day he asked Amy to go with him, wishing, if possible, to influence her for good by kind,

brotherly talk. Whilst she was getting ready he took John aside into the parlour, to impart a strange piece of news he had brought from Clerkenwell.

“Mrs. Peckover has had a narrow escape of being poisoned. She was found by one of her lodgers all but dead, and last night the police arrested her daughter on the charge.”

“Mrs. Snowdon?”

“Yes. The mother has accused her. There’s a man concerned in the affair. One of the men showed me a report in to-day’s paper; I didn’t buy one, because we shall have it in the Sunday paper to-morrow. Nice business, eh?”

“That’s for the old woman’s money, I’ll wager!” exclaimed Hewett, in an awed voice. “I can believe it of Clem; if ever there was a downright bad ’un! Was she living in the Close?”

“Mrs. Snowdon wasn’t. Somewhere in Hoxton. No doubt it was for the money—if the charge is true. We won’t speak of it before the children.”

“Think of that, now! Many’s the time I’ve looked at Clem Peckover and said to myself,

‘You’ll come to no good end, my lady!’
She was a fierce an’ bad ’un.”

Sidney nodded, and went off for his walk with Amy. . . .

It was a difficult thing to keep any room in the house orderly, and Sidney, as part of his struggle against the downward tendency in all about him, against the forces of chaos, often did the work of housemaid in the parlour; a little laxity in the rules which made this a sacred corner, and there would have been no spot where he could rest. With some success, too, he had resisted the habit prevalent in working-class homes of prolonging Saturday evening’s occupations until the early hours of Sunday morning. At a little after ten o’clock to-night John Hewett and the children were in bed; he too, weary in mind and body, would gladly have gone upstairs, but he lingered from one five minutes to the next, his heart sinking at the certainty that he would find Clara in sleepless misery which he had no power to allay.

Round the walls of the parlour were hung his own drawings, which used to conceal the bareness of his lodging in Tysoe Street. It was

three years since he had touched a pencil ; the last time having been when he made holiday with Michael Snowdon and Jane at the farmhouse by Danbury Hill. The impulse would never come again. It was associated with happiness, with hope ; and what had his life to do with one or the other ? Could he have effected the change without the necessity of explaining it, he would gladly have put those drawings out of sight. Whenever, as now, he consciously regarded them, they plucked painfully at his heart-strings, and threatened to make him a coward.

None of that ! He had his work to do, happiness or no happiness, and by all the virtue of manhood he would not fail in it—as far as success or failure was a question of his own resolve.

The few books he owned were placed on hanging shelves ; among them those which he had purchased for Clara since their marriage. But reading was as much a thing of the past as drawing. Never a moment when his mind was sufficiently at ease to refresh itself with other men's thoughts or fancies. As with John Hewett, so with himself ; the circle of

his interests had shrivelled, until it included nothing but the cares of his family, the cost of house and food and firing. As a younger man, he had believed that he knew what was meant by the struggle for existence in the nether world ; it seemed to him now as if such knowledge had been only theoretical. Oh, it was easy to preach a high ideal of existence for the poor, as long as one had a considerable margin over the week's expenses ; easy to rebuke the men and women who tried to forget themselves in beer-shops and gin-houses, as long as one could take up some rational amusement with a quiet heart. Now, on his return home from labour, it was all he could do not to sink in exhaustion and defeat of spirit. Shillings and pence ; shillings and pence ;—never a question of pounds, unfortunately ; and always too few of them. He understood how men have gone mad under pressure of household cares ; he realised the horrible temptation which has made men turn dastardly from the path leading homeward and leave those there to shift for themselves.

When on the point of lowering the lamp he heard some one coming downstairs. The

door opened, and, to his surprise, Clara came in. Familiarity could not make him insensible to that disfigurement of her once beautiful face ; his eyes always fell before her at the first moment of meeting.

“ What are you doing ? ” she asked. “ Why don’t you come up ? ”

“ I was that minute coming.”

His hand went again to the lamp, but she checked him. In a low, wailing, heart-breaking voice, and with a passionate gesture, she exclaimed, “ Oh, I feel as if I should go mad ! I can’t bear it much longer ! ”

Sidney was silent at first, then said quietly, “ Let’s sit here for a little. No wonder you feel low-spirited, lying in that room all day. I’d gladly have come and sat with you, but my company only seems to irritate you.”

“ What good can you do me ? You only think I’m making you miserable without a cause. You won’t say it, but that’s what you always think ; and when I feel that, I can’t bear to have you near. If only I could die and come to the end of it ! How can you tell what I suffer ? Oh yes, you speak so calmly—as good as telling me I am unreason-

able because I can't do the same. I hate to hear your voice when it's like that! I'd rather you raged at me or struck me!"

The beauty of her form had lost nothing since the evening when he visited her in Farringdon Road Buildings; now, as then, all her movements were full of grace and natural dignity. Whenever strong feeling was active in her, she could not but manifest it in motion unlike that of ordinary women. Her hair hung in disorder, though not at its full length, massing itself upon her shoulders, shadowing her forehead. Half-consumed by the fire that only death would extinguish, she looked the taller for her slenderness. Ah, had the face been untouched!

"You are unjust to me," Sidney replied, with emotion, but not resentfully. "I can enter into all your sufferings. If I speak calmly, it's because I *must*, because I daren't give way. One of us must try and be strong, Clara, or else"——

He turned away.

"Let us leave this house," she continued, hardly noticing what he said. "Let us live in some other place. Never any change—

always, always the same walls to look at, day and night—it's driving me mad ! ”

“ Clara, we can't move. I daren't spend even the little money it would cost. Do you know what Amy has been doing ? ”

“ Yes ; father told me.”

“ How can we go to the least needless expense, when every day makes living harder for us ? ”

“ What have we to do with them ? How can you be expected to keep a whole family ? It isn't fair to you or to me. You sacrifice me to them. It's nothing to you what I endure, so long as they are kept in comfort ! ”

He stepped nearer to her.

“ What do you really mean by that ? Is it seriously your wish that I should tell them—your father and your sisters and your brother—to leave the house and support themselves as best they can ? Pray, what would become of them ? Kept in *comfort*, are they ? How much comfort does your poor father enjoy ? Do you wish me to tell him to go out into the street, as I can help him no more ? ”

She moaned and made a wild gesture.

“ You know all this to be impossible ; you

don't wish it; you couldn't bear it. Then why will you drive me almost to despair by complaining so of what can't be helped? Surely you foresaw it all. You knew that I was only a working man. It isn't as if there had been any hope of my making a larger income, and you were disappointed."

"Does it make it easier to bear because there is no hope of relief?" she cried.

"For me, yes. If there *were* hope, I might fret under the misery."

"Oh, I had hope once! It might have been so different with me. The thought burns and burns and burns, till I am frantic. You don't help me to bear it. You leave me alone when I most need help. How can *you* know what it means to me to look back and think of what might have been? You say to yourself I am selfish, that I ought to be thankful some one took pity on me, poor, wretched creature that I am. It would have been kinder never to have come near me. I should have killed myself long ago, and there an end. You thought it was a great thing to take me, when you might have had a wife who would"—

"Clara! Clara! When you speak like that,

I could almost believe you are really mad. For Heaven's sake, think what you are saying ! Suppose I were to reproach you with having consented to marry me ? I would rather die than let such a word pass my lips,—but suppose you heard me speaking to you like this ?”

She drew a deep sigh, and let her hands fall. Sidney continued in quite another voice :

“ It's one of the hardest things I have to bear, that I can't make your life pleasanter. Of course you need change ; I know it only too well. You and I ought to have our holiday at this time of the year, like other people. I fancy I should like to go into the country myself ; Clerkenwell isn't such a beautiful place that one can be content to go there day after day, year after year, without variety. But we have no money. Suffer as we may, there's no help for it—because we have no money. Lives may be wasted—worse, far worse than wasted—just because there is no money. At this moment a whole world of men and women is in pain and sorrow—because they have no money. How often have we said that ? The world is made so ; everything has to be bought with money.”

"You find it easier to bear than I do."

"Yes; I find it easier. I am stronger-bodied, and at all events I have some variety, whilst you have none. I know it. If I could take your share of the burden, how gladly I'd do so! If I could take your suffering upon myself, you shouldn't be unhappy for another minute. But that is another impossible thing. People who are fortunate in life may ask each day what they *can* do; we have always to remind ourselves what we *can't*."

"You take a pleasure in repeating such things; it shows how little you feel them."

"It shows how I have taken to heart the truth of them."

She waved her hand impatiently, again sighed, and moved towards the door.

"Don't go just yet," said Sidney. "We have more to say to each other."

"I have nothing more to say. I am miserable, and you can't help me."

"I can, Clara."

She looked at him with wondering, estranged eyes. "How? What are you going to do?"

"Only speak to you, that's all. I have nothing to give but words. But"——

She would have left him. Sidney stepped forward and prevented her.

"No ; you *must* hear what I have got to say. They may be only words, but if I have no power to move you with my words, then our life has come to utter ruin, and I don't know what dreadful things lie before us."

"I can say the same," she replied, in a despairing tone.

"But neither you nor I shall say it ! As long as I have strength to speak, I won't consent to say that ! Clara, you must put your hand in mine, and think of your life and mine as one. If not for my sake, then for your child's. Think ; do you wish May to suffer for the faults of her parents ?"

"I wish she had never been born !"

"And yet you were the happier for her birth. It's only these last six months that you have fallen again into misery. You indulge it, and it grows worse, harder to resist. You may say that life seems to grow worse. Perhaps so. This affair of Amy's has been a heavy blow, and we shall miss the little money she brought ; goodness knows when another place will be found for her. But all the more

reason why we should help each other to struggle. Perhaps just this year or two will be our hardest time. If Amy and Annie and Tom were once all earning something, the worst would be over—wouldn't it? And can't we find strength to hold out a little longer, just to give the children a start in life, just to make your father's last years a bit happier? If we manage it, shan't we feel glad in looking back? Won't it be something worth having lived for?"

He paused, but Clara had no word for him.

"There's Amy. She's a hard girl to manage, partly because she has very bad health. I always think of that—or try to—when she irritates me. This afternoon I took her out with me, and spoke as kindly as I could; if she isn't better for it, she surely can't be worse, and in any case I don't know what else to do. Look, Clara, you and I are going to do what we can for these children; we're not going to give up the work now we've begun it. Mustn't all of us who are poor stand together and help one another? We have to fight against the rich world that's always crushing us down, down—whether it means to or not. Those people enjoy their lives. Well, I shall find

my enjoyment in defying them to make me despair! But I can't do without your help. I didn't feel very cheerful as I sat here a while ago, before you came down; I was almost afraid to go upstairs, lest the sight of what you were suffering should be too much for me. Am I to ask a kindness of you and be refused, Clara?"

It was not the first time that she had experienced the constraining power of his words when he was moved with passionate earnestness. Her desire to escape was due to a fear of yielding, of suffering her egotism to fail before a stronger will.

"Let me go," she said, whilst he held her arm. "I feel too ill to talk longer."

"Only one word—only one promise—now whilst we are the only ones awake in the house. We are husband and wife, Clara, and we must be kind to each other. We are not going to be like the poor creatures who let their misery degrade them. We are both too proud for that—what? We can think and express our thoughts; we can speak to each other's minds and hearts. Don't let us be beaten!"

"What's the good of my promising? I can't keep it. I suffer too much."

“Promise, and keep the promise for a few weeks, a few days; then I’ll find strength to help you once more. But now it’s your turn to help me. To-morrow begins a new week; the rich world allows us to rest to-morrow, to be with each other. Shall we make it a quiet, restful, hopeful day? When they go out in the morning, you shall read to father and me—read as you know how to, so much better than I can. What? Was that really a smile?”

“Let me go, Sidney. Oh, I’m tired, I’m tired!”

“And the promise?”

“I’ll do my best. It won’t last long, but I’ll try.”

“Thank you, dear.”

“No,” she replied, despondently. “It’s I that ought to thank you. But I never shall,—never. I only understand you now and then—just for an hour—and all the selfishness comes back again. It’ll be the same till I’m dead.”

He put out the lamp and followed her upstairs. His limbs ached; he could scarcely drag one leg after the other. Never mind; the battle was gained once more.

CHAPTER XIII.

JANE.

“THE poisoning business startled me. I shouldn’t at all wonder if I had a precious narrow squeak of something of the kind myself before I took my departure ; in fact, a sort of fear of the animal made me settle things as sharp as I could. Let me know the result of the trial. Wonder whether there’ll be any disagreeable remarks about a certain acquaintance of yours, detained abroad on business ? Better send me newspapers,—same name and address. . . . But I’ve something considerably more important to think about. . . . A big thing ; I scarcely dare tell you how big. I stand to win \$2,000,000 ! . . . Not a soul outside suspects the ring. When I tell you that R. S. N. is in it, you’ll see that I’ve struck the right ticket this time. . . . Let me hear about Jane. If all goes well here, and you manage that little business, you shall have \$100,000, just for

house-furnishing, you know. I suppose you'll have your partnership in a few months?"

Extracts from a letter, with an American stamp, which Mr. Scawthorne read as he waited for his breakfast. It was the end of October, and cool enough to make the crackling fire grateful. Having mused over the epistle, our friend took up his morning paper and glanced at the report of criminal trials. Whilst he was so engaged his landlady entered, carrying a tray of appetising appearance.

"Good-morning, Mrs. Byass," he said, with much friendliness. Then, in a lower voice, "There's a fuller report here than there was in the evening paper. Perhaps you looked at it?"

"Well, yes, sir; I thought you wouldn't mind," replied Bessie, arranging the table.

"She'll be taken care of for three years, at all events."

"If you'd seen her that day she came here after Miss Snowdon, you'd understand how glad I feel that she's out of the way. I'm sure I've been uneasy ever since. If ever there comes a rather loud knock at there I begin to tremble; I do indeed. I don't think I shall ever get over it."

"I daresay Miss Snowdon will be easier in mind?"

"I shouldn't wonder. But she won't say anything about it. She feels the disgrace so much, and I know it's almost more than she can do to go to work, just because she thinks they talk about her."

"Oh, that'll very soon pass over. There's always something new happening, and people quickly forget a case like this."

Bessie withdrew, and her lodger addressed himself to his breakfast.

He had occupied the rooms on the first floor for about a year and a half. Joseph Snowdon's proposal to make him acquainted with Jane had not been carried out, Scawthorne deeming it impracticable; but when a year had gone by, and Scawthorne, as Joseph's confidential correspondent, had still to report that Jane maintained herself in independence, he one day presented himself in Hanover Street, as a total stranger, and made inquiry about the rooms which a card told him were to let. His improved position allowed him to live somewhat more respectably than in the Chelsea lodging, and Hanover Street would suit him

well enough until he obtained the promised partnership. Admitted as a friend to Mr. Percival's house in Highbury, he had by this time made the acquaintance of Miss Lant, whom, by the exercise of his agreeable qualities, he one day led to speak of Jane Snowdon. Miss Lant continued to see Jane, at long intervals, and was fervent in her praise as well as in compassionating the trials through which she had gone. His position in Mr. Percival's office of course made it natural that Scawthorne should have a knowledge of the girl's story. When he had established himself in Mrs. Byass's rooms, he mentioned the fact casually to his friends, making it appear that, in seeking lodgings, he had come upon these by haphazard.

He could not but feel something of genuine interest in a girl who, for whatever reason, declined a sufficient allowance and chose to work for her living. The grounds upon which Jane took this decision were altogether unknown to him until an explanation came from her father. Joseph, when news of the matter reached him, was disposed to entertain suspicions; with every care not to betray his own whereabouts, he wrote to Jane, and in due

time received a reply, in which Jane told him truly her reasons for refusing the money. These Joseph communicated to Scawthorne, and the latter's interest was still more strongly awakened.

He was now on terms of personal acquaintance, almost of friendship, with Jane. Miss Lant, he was convinced, did not speak of her too praisingly. Not exactly a pretty girl, though far from displeasing in countenance; very quiet, very gentle, with much natural refinement. Her air of sadness—by no means forced upon the vulgar eye, but unmistakable when you studied her—was indicative of faithful sensibilities. Scawthorne had altogether lost sight of Sidney Kirkwood and of the Hewetts; he knew they were all gone to a remote part of London, and more than this he had no longer any care to discover. On excellent terms with his landlady, he skilfully elicited from her now and then a confidential remark with regard to Jane; of late, indeed, he had established something like a sentimental understanding with the good Bessie, so that, whenever he mentioned Jane, she fell into a pleasant little flutter, feeling that

she understood what was in progress. . . . Why not?—he kept asking himself. Joseph Snowdon (who addressed his letters to Hanover Street in a feigned hand) seemed to have an undeniable affection for the girl, and was constant in his promises of providing a handsome dowry. The latter was not a point of such importance as a few years ago, but the dollars would be acceptable. And then, the truth was, Scawthorne felt himself more and more inclined to put a certain question to Jane, dowry or none. . . .

Yes, she felt it as a disgrace, poor girl! When she saw the name “Snowdon” in the newspaper, in such a shameful and horrible connection, her impulse was to flee, to hide herself. It was dreadful to go to her work and hear the girls talking of this attempted murder. The new misery came upon her just as she was regaining something of her natural spirits, after long sorrow and depression which had affected her health. But circumstances, now as ever, seemed to plot that at a critical moment of her own experience she should be called out of herself and constrained to become the consoler of others.

For some months the domestic peace of Mr. and Mrs. Byass had been gravely disturbed. Unlike the household at Crouch End, it was to prosperity that Sam and his wife owed their troubles. Year after year Sam's position had improved; he was now in receipt of a salary which made—or ought to have made—things at home very comfortable. Though his children were now four in number, he could supply their wants. He could buy Bessie a new gown without very grave consideration, and could regard his own shiny top-hat, when he donned it in the place of one that was really respectable enough, without twinges of conscience.

But Sam was not remarkable for wisdom; indeed, had he been anything more than a foolish calculating-machine, he would scarcely have thriven as he did in the City. When he had grown accustomed to rattling loose silver in his pocket, the next thing, as a matter of course, was that he accustomed himself to pay far too frequent visits to City bars. On certain days in the week he invariably came home with a very red face and a titubating walk; when Bessie received him angrily, he defended himself on the great plea of business neces-

sities. As a town traveller there was no possibility, he alleged, of declining invitations to refresh himself; just as incumbent upon him was it to extend casual hospitality to those with whom he had business.

"Business! Fiddle!" cried Bessie. "All you City fellows are the same. You encourage each other in drink, drink, drinking whenever you have a chance, and then you say it's all a matter of business. I won't have you coming home in that state, so there! I won't have a husband as drinks! Why, you can't stand straight."

"Can't stand straight!" echoed Sam, with vast scorn. "Look here!"

And he shouldered the poker, with the result that one of the globes on the chandelier came in shivers about his head. This was too much. Bessie fumed, and for a couple of hours the quarrel was unappeasable.

Worse was to come. Sam occasionally stayed out very late at night, and on his return alleged a "business appointment." Bessie at length refused to accept these excuses; she couldn't and wouldn't believe them.

"Then don't!" shouted Sam. "And understand that I shall come home just when I like.

If you make a bother I won't come home at all, so there you have it!"

"You're a bad husband and a beast!" was Bessie's retort.

Shortly after that Bessie received information of such grave misconduct on her husband's part that she all but resolved to forsake the house, and with the children seek refuge under her parents' roof at Woolwich. Sam had been seen in indescribable company; no permissible words would characterise the individuals with whom he had roamed shamelessly on the pavement of Oxford Street. When he next met her, quite sober and with exasperatingly innocent expression, Bessie refused to open her lips. Neither that evening nor the next would she utter a word to him,—and the effort it cost her was tremendous. The result was, that on the third evening Sam did not appear.

It was a week after Clem's trial. Jane had been keeping to herself as much as possible, but, having occasion to go down into the kitchen late at night, she found Bessie in tears, utterly miserable.

"Don't bother about me!" was the reply to her sympathetic question. "You've got

your own upsets to think of. You might have come to speak to me before this—but never mind. It's nothing to you."

It needed much coaxing to persuade her to detail Sam's enormities, but she found much relief when she had done so, and wept more copiously than ever.

"It's nearly twelve o'clock, and there's no sign of him. Perhaps he won't come at all. He's in bad company, and if he stays away all night I'll never speak to him again as long as I live. Oh, he's a beast of a husband, is Sam!"

Sam came not. All through that night did Jane keep her friend company, for Sam came not. In the morning a letter, addressed in his well-known commercial hand. Bessie read it and screamed. Sam wrote to her that he had accepted a position as country traveller, and *perhaps* he might be able to look in at his home on that day month.

Jane could not go to work. The case had become very serious indeed; Bessie was in hysterics; the four children made the roof ring with their lamentations. At this juncture Jane put forth all her beneficent energy.

It happened that Bessie was just now servantless. There was Mr. Scawthorne's breakfast only half prepared; Jane had to see to it herself, and herself take it upstairs. Then Bessie must go to bed, or assuredly she would be so ill that unheard-of calamities would befall the infants. Jane would have an eye to everything; only let Jane be trusted.

The miserable day passed; after trying in vain to sleep, Bessie walked about her sitting-room with tear-swollen face and rumpled gown, always thinking it possible that Sam had only played a trick, and that he would come. But he came not, and again it was night.

At eight o'clock Mr. Scawthorne's bell rang. Impossible for Bessie to present herself; Jane would go. She ascended to the room which had once—ah, once!—been her own parlour, knocked and entered.

"I—I wished to speak to Mrs. Byass," said Scawthorne, appearing for some reason or other embarrassed by Jane's presenting herself.

"Mrs. Byass is not at all well, sir. But I'll let her know"——

"No, no; on no account."

"Can't I get you anything, sir?"

“Miss Snowdon,—might I speak with you for a few moments?”

Jane feared it might be a complaint. In a perfectly natural way she walked forward. Scawthorne came in her direction, and—closed the door.

The interview lasted ten minutes, then Jane came forth and with a light, quick step ran up to the floor above. She did not enter the room, however, but stood with her hand on the door, in the darkness. A minute or two, and with the same light, hurried step, she descended the stairs, sprang past the lodger's room, sped down to the kitchen. Under other circumstances Bessie must surely have noticed a strangeness in her look, in her manner; but to-night Bessie had thought for nothing but her own calamities.

Another day, and no further news from Sam. The next morning, instead of going to work (the loss of wages was most serious, but it couldn't be helped), Jane privately betook herself to Sam's house of business. Mrs. Byass was ill; would they let her know Mr. Byass's address, that he might immediately be communicated with? The information was

readily supplied ; Mr. Byass was no farther away, at present, than St. Albans. Forth into the street again, and in search of a policeman. “Will you please to tell me what station I have to go to for St. Albans ?” Why, Moorgate Street would do ; only a few minutes’ walk away. On she hastened. “What is the cost of a return ticket to St. Albans, please ?” Three-and-sevenpence. Back into the street again ; she must now look for a certain sign, indicating a certain place of business. With some little trouble it is found ; she enters a dark passage, and comes before a counter, upon which she lays—a watch, her grandfather’s old watch. “How much ?” “Four shillings, please.” She deposits a halfpenny, and receives four shillings, together with a ticket. Now for St. Albans.

Sam ! Sam ! Ay, well might he turn red and stutter and look generally foolish when that quiet little girl stood before him in his “stock-room” at the hotel. Her words were as quiet as her look. “I’ll write her a letter,” he cries. “Stop ; you shall take it back. I can’t give up the job at once, but you may tell her I’m up to no harm. Where’s the pen ?

Where's the cursed ink?" And she takes the letter.

"Why, you've lost a day's work, Jane! She gave you the money for the journey, I suppose?"

"Yes, yes, of course."

"Tell her she's not to make a fool of herself in future."

"No, I shan't say that, Mr. Byass. But I'm half-tempted to say it to some one else!"

It was the old, happy smile, come back for a moment; the voice that had often made peace so merrily. The return journey seemed short, and with glad heart-beating she hastened from the City to Hanover Street.

Well, well; of course it would all begin over again; Jane herself knew it. But is not all life a struggle onward from compromise to compromise, until the day of final pacification?

Through that winter she lived with a strange secret in her mind, a secret which was the source of singularly varied feelings,—of astonishment, of pain, of encouragement, of apprehension, of grief. To no one could she speak of it; no one could divine its existence—no one save the person to whom she owed this surprising novelty in her experience. She would have

given much to be rid of it; and yet, again, might she not legitimately accept that pleasure which at times came of the thought?—the thought that, as a woman, her qualities were of some account in the world.

She did her best to keep it out of her consciousness, and in truth had so many other things to think about that it was seldom she really had trouble with it. Life was not altogether easy; regular work was not always to be kept; there was much need of planning and pinching, that her independence might suffer no wound. Bessie Byass was always in arms against that same independent spirit; she scoffed at it, assailed it with treacherous blandishment, made direct attacks upon it.

“I must live in my own way, Mrs. Byass. I don’t want to have to leave you.”

And if ever life seemed a little too hard, if the image of the past grew too mournfully persistent, she knew where to go for consolation. Let us follow her, one Saturday afternoon early in the year.

In a poor street in Clerkenwell was a certain poor little shop,—built out as an afterthought from an irregular lump of houses; a shop with

a room behind it and a cellar below ; no more. Here was sold second-hand clothing, women's and children's. No name over the front, but neighbours would have told you that it was kept by one Mrs. Todd, a young widow with several children. Mrs. Todd, not long ago, used to have only a stall in the street ; but a lady named Miss Lant helped her to start in a more regular way of business.

“ And does she carry it on quite by herself ? ”

No ; with her lived another young woman, also a widow, who had one child. Mrs. Hewett, her name. She did sewing in the room behind, or attended to the shop when Mrs. Todd was away making purchases.

There Jane Snowdon entered. The clothing that hung in the window made it very dark inside ; she had to peer a little before she could distinguish the person who sat behind the counter. “ Is Pennyloaf in, Mrs. Todd ? ”

“ Yes, Miss. Will you walk through ? ”

The room behind is lighted from the ceiling. It is heaped with the most miscellaneous clothing. It contains two beds, some shelves with crockery, a table, some chairs,—but it would have taken you a long time to note all these

details, so huddled together was everything. Part of the general huddling were five children, of various ages; and among them, very busy, sat Pennyloaf.

"Everything going on well?" was Jane's first question.

"Yes, Miss."

"Then I know it isn't. Whenever you call me 'Miss,' there's something wrong; I've learnt that."

Pennyloaf smiled, sadly but with affection in her eyes. "Well, I have been a bit low, an' that's the truth. It takes me sometimes, you know. I've been thinkin', when I'd oughtn't."

"Same with me, Pennyloaf. We can't help thinking, can we? What a good thing if we'd nothing more to think about than these children! Where's little Bob? Why, Bob, I thought you were old clothes; I did, really! You may well laugh!"

The laughter was merry, and Jane encouraged it, inventing all sorts of foolish jokes. "Pennyloaf, I wish you'd ask me to stay to tea."

"Then that I will, Miss Jane, an' gladly. Would you like it soon?"

"No; in an hour will do, won't it? Give

me something that wants sewing, a really hard bit, something that'll break needles. Yes, that'll do. Where's Mrs. Todd's thimble? Now we're all going to be comfortable, and we'll have a good talk."

Pennyloaf found the dark thoughts slip away insensibly. And she talked, she talked, —where was there such a talker as Pennyloaf now-a-days, when she once began?

Mr. Byass was not very willing, after all, to give up his country travelling. That his departure on that business befell at a moment of domestic quarrel was merely chance; secretly he had made the arrangement with his firm some weeks before. The penitence which affected him upon Jane's appeal could not be of abiding result; for, like all married men at a certain point of their lives, he felt heartily tired of home and wished to see the world a little. Hanover Street heard endless discussions of the point, between Sam and Bessie, between Bessie and Jane, between Jane and Sam, between all three together. And the upshot was, that Mr. Byass gained his point. For a time he would go on country journeys.

Bessie assented sullenly, but, strange to say, she had never been in better spirits than on the day after this decision had been arrived at.

On that day, however,—it was early in March,—an annoying incident happened. Mr. Scawthorne, who always dined in town and seldom returned to his lodgings till late in the evening, rang his bell about eight o'clock and sent a message by the servant that he wished to see Mrs. Byass. Bessie having come up, he announced to her with gravity that his tenancy of the rooms would be at an end in a fortnight. Various considerations necessitated his living in a different part of London. Bessie frankly lamented; she would never again find such an estimable lodger. But, to be sure, Mr. Scawthorne had prepared her for this, three months ago. Well, what must be, must be.

"Is Miss Snowdon in the house, Mrs. Byass?" Scawthorne went on to inquire.

"Miss Snowdon? Yes."

"This letter from America, which I found on coming in, contains news she must hear—disagreeable news, I'm sorry to say."

"About her father?" Bessie inquired anxiously.

Scawthorne nodded a grave and confidential affirmative. He had never given Mrs. Byass reason to suppose that he knew anything of Joseph's whereabouts, but Bessie's thoughts naturally turned in that direction.

The news comes to me by chance," he continued. "I think I ought to communicate it to Miss Snowdon privately, and leave her to let you know what it is, as doubtless she will. Would it be inconvenient to you to let me have the use of your parlour for five minutes?"

"I'll go and light the gas at once, and tell Miss Snowdon."

"Thank you, Mrs. Byass."

He was nervous, a most unusual thing with him. Till Bessie's return he paced the room irregularly, chewing the ends of his moustache. When it was announced to him that the parlour was ready he went down, the letter in his hand. At the half-open door came a soft knock. Jane entered.

She showed signs of painful agitation.

"Will you sit down, Miss Snowdon? It happens that I have a correspondent in the United States, who has lately had—had business relations with Mr. Joseph Snowdon, your

father. On returning this evening I found a letter from my friend, in which there is news of a distressing kind."

He paused. What he was about to say was—for once—the truth. The letter, however, came from a stranger, a lawyer in Chicago.

"Your father, I understand, has lately been engaged in—in commercial speculation on a great scale. His enterprises have proved unfortunate. One of those financial crashes which are common in America caused his total ruin."

Jane drew a deep breath.

"I am sorry to say that is not all. The excitement of the days when his fate was hanging in the balance led to illness—fatal illness. He died on the sixth of February."

Jane, with her eyes bent down, was motionless. After a pause, Scawthorne continued :

"I will speak of this with Mr. Percival to-morrow, and every inquiry shall be made—on your behalf."

"Thank you, sir."

She rose, very pale, but with more self-command than on entering the room. The latter part of his communication seemed to have affected her as a relief.

“Miss Snowdon,—if you would allow me to say a few more words. You will remember I mentioned to you that there was a prospect of my becoming a partner in the firm which I have hitherto served as clerk. A certain examination had to be passed, that I might be admitted a solicitor. That is over; in a few days my position as a member of the firm will be assured.”

Jane waited, her eyes still cast down.

“I feel that it may seem to you an ill-chosen time; but the very fact that I have just been the bearer of such sad news impels me to speak. I cannot keep the promise that I would never revive the subject on which I spoke to you not long ago. Forgive me; I *must* ask you again if you cannot think of me as I wish? Miss Snowdon, will you let me devote myself to making your life happy? It has always seemed to me that if I could attain a position such as I now have, there would be little else to ask for. I began life poor and half-educated, and you cannot imagine the difficulties I have overcome. But if I go away from this house, and leave you so lonely; living such a hard life, there will be very

little satisfaction for me in my success. Let me try to make for you a happiness such as you merit. It may seem as if we were very slightly acquainted, but I know you well enough to esteem you more highly than any woman I ever met, and if you could but think of me"—

He was sincere. Jane had brought out the best in him. With the death of Snowdon all his disreputable past seemed swept away, and he had no thought of anything but a decent rectitude, a cleanly enjoyment of existence, for the future. But Jane was answering :

"I can't change what I said before, Mr. Scawthorne. I am very content to live as I do now. I have friends I am very fond of. Thank you for your kindness,—but I can't change."

Without intending it, she ceased upon a word which to her hearer conveyed a twofold meaning. He understood; offer what he might, it could not tempt her to forget the love which had been the best part of her life. She was faithful to the past, and unchanging.

Mrs. Byass never suspected the second purpose for which her lodger had desired to speak

with Jane this evening. Scawthorne in due time took his departure, with many expressions of good-will, many assurances that nothing could please him better than to be of service to Bessie and her husband.

“He wished me to say good-bye to you for him,” said Bessie, when Jane came back from her work.

So the romance in her life was over. Michael Snowdon’s wealth had melted away ; with it was gone for ever the hope of realising his high projects. All passed into the world of memory, of dream,—all save the spirit which had ennobled him, the generous purpose bequeathed to those two hearts which had loved him best.

To his memory all days were sacred ; but one, that of his burial, marked itself for Jane as the point in each year to which her life was directed, the saddest, yet bringing with it her supreme solace.

A day in early spring, cloudy, cold. She left the workroom in the dinner-hour, and did not return. But instead of going to Hanover Street, she walked past Islington Green, all

along Essex Road, northward thence to Stoke Newington, and so came to Abney Park Cemetery ; a long way, but it did not weary her.

In the cemetery she turned her steps to a grave with a plain headstone. Before leaving England, Joseph Snowdon had discharged this duty. The inscription was simply a name, with dates of birth and death.

And, as she stood there, other footsteps approached the spot. She looked up, with no surprise, and gave her hand for a moment. On the first anniversary the meeting had been unanticipated ; the same thought led her and Sidney to the cemetery at the same hour. This was the third year, and they met as if by understanding, though neither had spoken of it.

When they had stood in silence for a while, Jane told of her father's death and its circumstances. She told him, too, of Pennyloaf's humble security.

" You have kept well all the year ? " he asked.

" And you too, I hope ? "

Then they bade each other good-bye. . . .

In each life little for congratulation. He

with the ambitions of his youth frustrated; neither an artist, nor a leader of men in the battle for justice. She, no saviour of society by the force of a superb example; no daughter of the people, holding wealth in trust for the people's needs. Yet to both was their work given. Unmarked, unencouraged save by their love of uprightness and mercy, they stood by the side of those more hapless, brought some comfort to hearts less courageous than their own. Where they abode it was not all dark. Sorrow certainly awaited them, perchance defeat in even the humble aims that they had set themselves; but at least their lives would remain a protest against those brute forces of society which fill with wreck the abysses of the nether world.

THE END.

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